

THE MEN OF THE BURMA ROAD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CHINESE EYE

CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY

A CHINESE CHILDHOOD

BIRDS AND BEASTS

CHINPAO AND THE GIANT PANDAS

CHINPAO AT THE ZOO

THE SILENT TRAVELLER IN LAKELAND

THE SILENT TRAVELLER IN LONDON

THE SILENT TRAVELLER IN WARTIME

THE SILENT TRAVELLER IN THE
YORKSHIRE DALES

LO CHENG, THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T
KEEP STILL



CHINESE FATHERS AND SONS AT A BREAK ON THE SIAM ROAD

THE MEN OF THE BURMA ROAD

羅鐵民

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SIXTH EDITION



METHUEN & CO LTD LONDON

36 Essex Street, Strand, W C.2

First Edition	.	.	January, 1942
Second Edition	.	.	September 1942
Third Edition	.	.	December 1942
Fourth Edition	.	.	May 1943
Fifth Edition	.	.	February 1944
Sixth Edition	.	.	1945

TO
HSIAO CH'EN
WHO WITNESSED THE COMPLETION OF
THE BURMA ROAD
AND TO
THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR
LIVES TO THE ROAD
THEIR LABOUR AND SACRIFICE WILL NOT BE IN VAIN

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A SURPRISING MEETING

'HULLO, Old Lo, I haven't seen you for a long time What wind blows you here?'

Li, the speaker, was a middle-aged peasant who lived just outside the southern end of the city of Kunming, capital of Yunnan. Li and Lo were related, Li had married one of Lo's cousins on his grandmother's side, and in China family connection, however distant, binds people together for ever, no matter how far destiny may separate them in space. Li was a jolly, easy-going fellow who dearly loved his own piece of land. Day after day, year after year, he had ploughed and cultivated his three acres. When his fellow-peasants worried over drought and flood in the rice-fields, he remained placid, and always managed somehow to have a sufficient crop. But he had a weakness. He loved talking—talking on every subject he knew.

He had always got on well with Old Lo, though Lo was much older and seemed by nature the opposite of Li in every way. Lo was quiet, conservative and experienced. When Li accosted him so merrily, he merely returned a gentle smile and said 'O, I'm just so-so. I have come to see my young son, Tieh-mung (that Iron-person), who is supposed to have—I forget what they call it—finished his studies at the government school. His teachers told him to ask me to be present at some ceremony, apparently Tieh-mung has done something good in his class. But Li, how can I mix with long-gown-wearers? They are intelligent people while I am a simple shabby farmer. I do not think I have the courage to go in and speak to those Masters. Of course, I am glad that Tieh-mung has finished his studies, because now he can help me in the fields. I have only come here because I could not resist my son's excitement and persistence.'

'That's just it, Lo I am here for the same reason. And look at me!' Apparently Li had bought himself a second-hand long-gown of plain deep blue cloth. It did not suit him very well. 'My little girl Hsiao-mei (Small Plum),' he continued, 'is also finishing her studies. She told me that her teachers say that she has now "graduated" from the school and will be able to get a job in the Industrial Co-operative Society. You know, I suppose, that "to graduate" means "to finish studying"?' Have you heard of the local co-operative society? It is a shop where you can buy goods cheaper than anywhere else if you become a member of the society. . '

'O, Li, don't tell me so many new terms. I'm too old to learn them. You and I are simple farmers. We need not copy these city-dwellers' words. If the government had not forced me to send Tich-mung to school I should have had him well-trained in ploughing, weeding, harrowing and harvesting by this time. He is now fourteen and a half and very strong. However, he will be a good farmer nevertheless and continue my work on the land when I die. Your daughter must be fifteen, isn't she? A little older than Tich-mung. You weren't obliged to send her to school, and I don't think you were wise to do so. She will find it difficult to settle down to help your wife with the housework.'

customers. Both my wife and Hsiao-mei say that the government has been setting up many schools in the cities and the countryside of China to encourage all of us, old and young, man and woman, to learn to read and write. Everything is taught free. I am thinking of going to school myself one day.

'What! Your wife has been to school and you are thinking of going yourself! What will happen to your land? I don't think it is necessary for us to learn, though we must accord respect to those who are learned in books. Your ancestors and mine have always been farmers. They did not go to school and they got along well enough without learning. Our villagers and neighbours have always spoken of them as good farmers. I remember when my father was dying he told me that I must obey his wish and stick to our land always. He said that that little piece of land has belonged to our family for many hundreds of years. So I must stick to it to fulfil my father's wish. I only regret that my elder son, Kan-ming (that Steel-person) did not follow in my steps, but ran away from home a year ago to join the Provincial Army. Since then he has been moved from one place to another. Now he is stationed in this city and I must try to see him while I am here today. You know that my daughter Hsiao-lien (Small Waterlily) found a husband for herself through her brother Kan-ming? The husband is also a soldier in the Provincial Army. He was chosen to go to Nanking with the Chairman of the Yunnan Provincial Government, General Lung Yun, for a conference, so my daughter has gone to Nanking also in order to be with him. I objected to my daughter's marriage and also to my elder son joining the army, but it seems everything is changed now and youngsters do not respect their elders nor obey their fathers very much. I am getting on in life, and I must try to see that at least my younger son, Tieh-mung, fulfils my wish and his grandfather's and sticks to the land."

'Yes, I did not know that. But, as you say, everything is changing nowadays. So I think I might as well go to school too."

'Don't keep saying you are going to school, Li. What can you learn when your mind is not made for learning? Won't you feel ashamed if you sit with youngsters and they can answer questions better than you can? Think more of your land, Li, which your ancestors handed down to you. You must keep it well cultivated and looked after. I think you can get your daughter Hsiao-mei married to a young farmer when she is of an age to marry and then you can adopt her husband as your son to carry on the cultivation of your land.'

'That reminds me, Lo, I have something to tell you. My wife is expecting a son next month. You must come and eat red eggs with us.' There was an air of innocent shyness and pride on Li's face.

Old Lo laughed. So did Li. They both seemed very happy!

Just at that moment, Lo Tieh-ming came running up to his father, for whom he had been searching in the crowd for a long time.

There were far too many people present, mothers and fathers of students from all over Kunming city. The ceremony was to be held in the Temple of Confucius because it was situated in the centre of Kunming and had a very big hall and a vast courtyard where many thousand people could stand. The authorities, anxious to impress the general public, had decorated the Temple very lavishly and provided many interesting things to see. Knowing that every simple Chinese peasant will come to pay respect to Confucius, they had chosen the Temple for the ceremony with the idea of encouraging learning. They had had difficulty in persuading people to come to school, so they had planned this occasion to interest the elders of the community. And indeed, most of the parents had come. The courtyard was packed. Many elders, with white hair or beard, had never before had a chance to look at the city, and now they craned their necks and opened wide their eyes in search of their children or grandchildren. The youngsters rushed hither and thither, darting under an arm or grasping the wrong hand or calling the wrong person. It was a noisy but very gay scene.

Lo Tieh-ming having at last made his way to his father, found him still laughing at Li's words. The boy thought his old father must certainly feel cheered at the sight of the Temple and all the people, so he held his right hand tightly and kept jumping up and down saying: 'Father, aren't you delighted to be here? I knew you would like to come. You are glad, aren't you? Oh, let's go near the gate of the hall. I think it will open soon.' He tugged at his father's sleeve and moved on.

'Be respectful, Tieh-ming.' Old Lo suddenly composed his face. 'Here is your Uncle Li,' he said imperiously. 'Pay him your respect.'

'It is not necessary,' remarked Li still laughing. 'You are a good boy, Tieh-ming. I am here to see my little daughter, Hsiao-mei, who is a graduate like you.'

While Tieh-ming was bowing to Uncle Li, he was wondering why his parents had never told him that he had a relation at the same school. It would have been great fun to have known somebody, and to have studied together. He had forgotten that for this day's ceremony all the schools of Kunming had combined. Li Hsiao-mei was at a different school from Lo Tieh-ming. As Old Lo very seldom came to town he knew very little of the city, his farm lay to the west of Kunming so Lo Tieh-ming had never had an opportunity to meet Li Hsiao-mei.

Now the gate of the hall was just opening. 'There she is,' said Li, and he began to make his way towards the girl as he moved with the crowd through the gate into the hall.

Li Hsiao-mei was a good-looking girl. But for the little plaits behind her ears she might have passed for one of the modern girl students at the University. She was tall enough to be 'grown-up' and wore a neat blue and white dress. Old Lo liked her, but in his heart he thought that she did not look like a farmer's daughter and that Li should not have encouraged her in the new ways. To his old-fashioned mind and conventional ideas, a farmer's daughter should dress for the country and field work. The same applied to her father. He glanced at Li's

second-hand long-gown again. It was clean, but it did not fit Li's broad shoulders, and the sleeves were too tight. It was obvious that he felt uncomfortable. As he walked up the steps to the gate of the hall, he was embarrassed by the tail of the gown flapping round his legs, which he was accustomed to have free for striding about. People were smiling at his manner of walking. Then Old Lo thought of his own clothes. They did not seem very suitable either. It took him a little while to master his feelings and pass through the gate.

In a few moments Tieh-ming was introduced to Li Hsiao-mei, and the pair talked happily and wished they had met before.

The hall was packed. The youngsters chattered incessantly, and the elders, mostly countryfolk who had rarely if ever been to town and certainly never before seen a gathering like this, noisily pointed to this and that. It was a most impressive and cheerful occasion. Presently a bell rang and the government officials and school authorities advanced in a line to the platform which had been erected in front of the altar under a tablet of Confucius. Chinese country-folk have always accorded high respect to a local governor, who is traditionally regarded as the 'parent' of the people under his protection. Scholars share this high respect too, for learned people generally hold responsible positions in the community. When the dignitaries had taken their seats on the platform the hall suddenly became still.

First the representative of the Chairman of the Yunnan Provincial Government spoke enthusiastically of the work already done for Mass Education, and praised the fathers and mothers who had allowed their children to attend school, thus making possible the government's plan to teach them to read and write. He went on to express the hope that those fathers and mothers who had realised the advantage of their children being able to read and write would themselves come to school, for it was the wish of the Central Government of the Chinese Republic that every citizen of the country should be taught to read and write in order that they could look after their own interests and play their part in national affairs. Later speakers

reiterated the importance of being able to read and write and encouraged everybody who could spare the time to attend school

The mothers and fathers smiled when they were praised, but their faces suddenly became blank when they were asked to come to school. Not that they had any objection to learning, but they had not had the chance to learn when they were young and now they felt they were too old and busy. Many thought the suggestion that they should mix with the youngsters comical. Old Lo thought that. He agreed with all that had been said by the speakers but failed to see any point in learning to read and write if one was a farmer and had to be busy day and night in the fields. As he had said before, his father and grandfather and ancestors had never been to school and had managed their lives satisfactorily. He believed that some people should study and some plough and work in the fields. To him fate had assigned field work. Somehow he could not see the connection between ploughing and learning, though he gave all due respect to the speakers. Li reacted differently. He grew very excited when he felt the official's praise falling to him, and wanted to express still more support for the government scheme. He kept muttering, 'I must go to school to learn. I must go to school to learn,' though he knew that he had to plough and cultivate his land day and night too.

Finally, a short official stood up in the middle of the platform with a long list of students' names in his hand which he read out one by one. These were the students considered the best in their classes. Before long came the name of Li Hsiao-mei. She had to stand up, and her good looks, the little blush on her cheeks and her charming smile won as much applause as her scholastic merit. Then her father was asked to stand up as an example to the other fathers. Up jumped Old Li crying, 'I must go to school to learn! I must go to school to learn!' His sincerity coupled with his comical appearance in the tight-sleeved long-gown made everyone laugh and he joined in himself. Lo Tieh-nung's name followed soon after, and Old

Lo had to stand up, but as he was shy about his clothes and hesitated to answer the call, he and his son's good work were passed by without much notice. Many more names were mentioned by the short official, but certainly Li Hsiao-mei's and her father's were the most talked-of.

Old Lo badly wanted to make use of the opportunity afforded by his visit to town to see his elder son Kan-ming. But Li insisted on Lo paying his wife a visit first, saying that he would accompany Lo to see Kan-ming afterwards. Lo agreed, and the two fathers and the two children set off happily together towards the southern end of the city. Old Lo was very pleased to see his cousin, Li's wife, after such a long time, but she surprised him with a great change in her looks and manner of talking, due, he felt sure, to her school-going. This roused the old farmer's mixed feelings again. On the one hand he admired her for being neat, clean and dressed like a town-dweller, on the other, he refused to admit that that was really good in a farmer's wife, who was supposed to do all sorts of rough labour in the fields and normally had difficulty in keeping herself clean. He feared his cousin might not want to do field work any more and that that would be a handicap to Li. Lo's conservative mind was bounded on all sides by tradition and convention. He did not say much to Li's wife beyond exchanging greetings and asking her to go and see his family when she had the time and happened to be walking in their direction. He did not, however, forget to tease his cousin about the red eggs he expected to come and eat when her new baby was born. Then he left with Li, Hsiao-mei and Tieh-ming for the army barracks.



CONVERSATION BEFORE THE TEMPLE OF CONFUCIUS



AFTERNOON ON LAKE KUNMING

Walking some miles early every morning was nothing to Kan-ming, and he proved himself a good salesman too, always bringing back a considerable sum of money in the evening. It was a great relief to Old Lo not to have to go himself to town and to be able therefore to devote all his time to his beloved land. Day after day, month after month, even year after year, Kan-ming walked to town in the morning and back in the evening, getting to know, naturally, a great deal about town life and making many acquaintances. These acquaintances did not meet with much approval from Old Lo, who supposed them to be either disreputable soldiers or vagrant street-rascals. Now and then Kan-ming helped his father to till the land, but all the time he dreamed of the gay and varied life of the city, and at last he decided to live there. Unable to find any employment in Kunming he was reduced to joining the Provincial Army Corps. When he reached the age of twenty, he could have helped Old Lo immensely on the land, but he had gone for a soldier. Much to Kan-ming's distress, the old couple were so upset at his action that for a time they would have nothing to do with him. Old Lo would fly into a temper at the mere mention of town life. He no longer wanted to go to town even to sell his surplus vegetables. It was the old mother who could not for ever stifle her affection for her son, and by degrees she persuaded Lo, too, to think more kindly of him. Eventually Kan-ming began to be seen in his old home again from time to time on leave, and Lo would go to see him whenever his regiment came to Kunming. He knew the boy was now stationed at Ta-kuan-lou, the Great-View Chamber, on the shore of Lake Kunming.

Lo and Li and the two youngsters, walked along the busiest street, Chengyi Road, looking at the gaily decorated shops on both sides and at the many people shopping and sightseeing. Lo realised what a long time it must be since he last came to town for things to have changed so much. In his recollection the streets were very narrow and, though paved with big well-cut stones, uneven and slippery. Now he saw them widened

and the shops built in a sort of mixed style neither traditional Chinese nor European. Rickshaws and motor cars sped side by side in the middle of the road, and Old Lo did not dare to cross. Li kept telling him that with the growth of the city's population the demand for fresh vegetables and rice had increased too. He had done good business himself, and said he would like to come to live in town and open a small shop. He would have to get someone to help with the work on the land, especially now that his wife could read and write; but she would be a great help in running the business.

Old Lo at first felt glad, then a little envious at the way Li was getting on, but later he returned to his habitual scornful attitude towards town life. 'I don't think that will do you any good,' he said. 'We have always lived in the country and been content to keep ourselves by daily toil on the land. Town life is bound to make one desire expensive things and pleasures and thus become lazy. How can we poor farmers live like the wealthy people who inherit fortunes from their fathers and ancestors? If one day you find yourself unable to cope with the expenses of town life you will feel sorry you left your beautiful land. I am older than you, Li, and I tell you I think you should stick to the land and not try to move to town. We must be faithful to our ancestors and keep our land productive for the sake of the family. If you don't mind my saying so, I would like to advise you not to let your wife and daughter become accustomed to town life and dress like town-dwellers. I am glad that Tich-ming has finished his schooling and that I can now teach him to love the land and give him thorough training in field work.'

Presently they all paused at a goldsmith's shop between two old monuments, the Golden Horse and the Green Cock. These stood in the centre of the city, but how they came to be there and why they were called by such names it did not occur to the party to enquire. Old Lo liked to pause here. These monuments, which had not changed a scrap since he first knew them, were old friends. But now he had to move on with the rest of the party, and soon they approached Ta-Kuan-Lou.

Kan-ming had asked for leave for the whole afternoon and was already waiting for his father outside the building. They greeted one another happily. Kan-ming was surprised to see his younger brother and Li Hsiao-mei and Old Li as well as his father. Lo thought Kan-ming had improved. He kept smiling at his father, whose questions he answered very politely and intelligently, adding many interesting remarks. This pleased the old man greatly. Since Kan-ming had joined the army he had received a good general education as well as instruction in his military duties. He could read and write and was well-informed about world events. The modern Chinese soldier is different in many ways from the old type, but how could the conservatively-minded and obstinate Old Lo be expected to understand that?

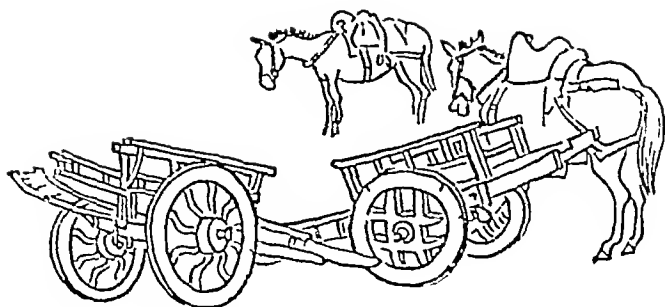
As Ta-Kuan-Lou was a beautiful spot, deriving its name of Grand-View Chamber from the panoramic prospect of Lake Kunming which it commanded, Kan-ming suggested taking the party round those parts of the building which were not used by the army. He then led them along the side of the lake. The city of Kunming has a warm, mild climate all the year round, its soil is very fertile and will grow anything. Many flowers transplanted from Kunming have been found to grow in all parts of the world. Rhododendrons, for instance, grow wild on the hill slopes round the city. The weather seems always to be spring. Just now it was the early summer of 1937. Old Lo and the rest stood by the shore, watching boats drifting on the water, full of people gazing at the multi-coloured flowers along the banks and enjoying the beauty of the place. It was particu-

larly in the afternoon that the townspeople loved to come, when they had finished their work, for gentle exercise and relaxation to the lake

But to Old Lo, the scenery and the flowers and the peaceful atmosphere did not appeal nearly so much as did the distant rice-fields on the further bank 'The young rice is turning colour now,' he declared to Li 'There will be a good crop I wish my land was as near the lake as that, so that I need not worry about water for my plants' Old Lo's land was on the lower slope of a mountain The soil was fertile, but sometimes it needed a good deal of water which Old Lo had laboriously to carry to his fields Lifting his head he looked at the upper part of the distant hills, where the sky was brilliant with the sunset Nothing, it seemed, could be more beautiful than the reflection of the reddened sky in the lake But it did not last long Clouds rolled up and rain fell heavily for a time The strollers moved to stand under trees, while those in boats sat under the awnings Old Lo and his party chose a tree As the shower lessened Lo saw a rainbow arch itself across the lake to the west 'A rainbow in the east means fine weather a rainbow in the west means rain,' he observed happily 'The old saying always comes true I shall have plenty of water for my land tomorrow' Li agreed, he too seemed pleased

The sky cleared but no one moved to go home Kan-ming suggested spending some of his savings on the hire of a boat The suggestion appealed to Tich-ming and Hsiao-mei, but Old Lo, though liking the idea, was reproachful that his son should be so profligate as to spend good money on a pleasure trip, a thing he had himself never done in his life He rebuked Kan-ming severely 'If I were to tell your mother she would be most grieved,' he said 'She and I have toiled so hard to earn a humble living'

Of course, after that no more was said But before the party separated Kan-ming took out the money he had saved and asked his father to buy something with it for his mother Delighted at the sign of filial regard, the old man bid his son goodbye.



NATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORT

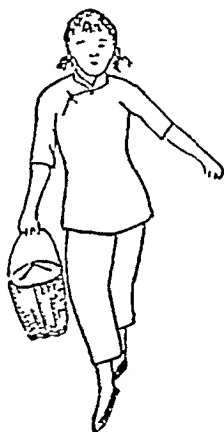
II

NEWS

NEXT day Li's wife carefully packed up the second-hand long-gown, and Li went out to the fields again in his old worn suit. He did not mind. He was very happy, toiling away and thinking of the harvest to come. Presently the day grew very warm. The sun shone brilliantly on the green rice-fields, and Li's coat became wet with sweat. He took it off and worked with the upper part of his body naked, displaying his muscular arms and chest and his skin tanned to the greyish-brown of earth. He had a thin moustache on his upper lip and a moderate beard on his chin, both as jet-black as the bushy hair on his head. Stretching and breathing deeply he held his long-handled hoe in his right hand. Now and then he paused to look at his fields. Many neighbouring farmers were hoeing and harrowing industriously and some of them pulling up weeds and thinning out rice-plants. In the distance he could just see two small figures turning the old water-wheels to bring water up from the lower levels. The sky was as blue as sea water and the two figures appeared as if perched on the horizon, silhouetted in blue. The trunks of distant trees were no bigger than the rice-stems in Li's own fields. As he wiped his brow he noticed that

not a leaf of the tall tree near the boundary of his land fluttered. Bending down again he resumed his hoeing. For farmers it was the busiest time of the year.

When Li next straightened himself the sun was in mid-sky, and the neighbours were eating the mid-day meal brought them by their relatives. Li felt hungry too, but he was not impatient, for he knew that on that day his meal might be late, for a reason which made him smile to himself from time to time. He was more cheerful than usual. He was expecting good news.



CARRYING FOOD FOR HER FATHER

Suddenly he saw his daughter Hsiao-mei running towards him along the little stream, he watched her cross the tiny wooden bridge, carrying a little basket containing his meal. Smiling and panting she approached, too out of breath to speak. Old Li was very impatient.

'Mother'—at last Hsiao-mei jerked out—'Mother has given birth to a baby son.'

It was just what Old Li had expected, but he blinked and fidgeted as though he could not believe it. Hsiao-mei busied herself laying out his meal. It consisted only of a jar of rice,

a few pickles and some cooked fresh cabbage, and he had soon swallowed it. Li praised his daughter's cooking and then said he must leave the field work for a while and go home to see his new-born son. Then he shouldered the long-handled hoe and moved off with Hsiao-mei. 'Ha ha,' he murmured as he walked. 'Now I have a baby son.' Hsiao-mei smiled. 'Now I have a baby brother,' she said.

Hsiao-mei had been proving herself very useful at home. For the time being her mother could not do much housework, so Hsiao-mei had asked for, and been granted, a few days' leave from the local co-operative society for which she worked. After that her mother would be able to resume the housework. Most ordinary Chinese peasant women are very strong and go on working until the baby is due to be born. Hsiao-mei had been at home only two days. She had to do the washing and prepare the meals, and now she had had to dash to one of the neighbours and ask her to come and act as midwife. It was impossible for peasant mothers to go to hospital, for there were no hospitals nearby. Besides, Old Li and his wife considered such a thing unnecessary, and in any case could not have afforded it. So the baby son was born in the thousand-year-old manner and turned out a very beautiful little thing.

After a day or two Li remembered Old Lo's remark and decided he must send him this piece of good news. Hsiao-mei's schooling again came in useful. She wrote a letter to Lo describing her new baby brother.

All the members of the household were happy. A day later Li returned to the fields as usual, and Hsiao-mei resumed her work in the co-operative society.

The letter reached Lo's place while he and Tieh-ming were in the fields. Lo's wife was overjoyed to see a letter arriving, supposing it to have come from her only daughter, who lived with her husband in Nanking. Lo's wife was a charming little woman of about sixty, the white hair on the top of her head contrasting prettily with her red cheeks. She knew her own house and fields like the palm of her hand, but had never visited

any other place since she married Lo at the age of eighteen. Though many other farmers and their wives lived all around, the work of her house and fields kept her too busy to strike up acquaintances. She met and talked to scarcely anyone but her husband, her daughter and her sons. Her cooking she did entirely with the products of the family's fields, with some salts, fats and vegetable oils brought home now and again by Lo and the elder son. But lately things had changed very much. Since her elder son joined the Provincial Corps she saw him rarely, and became anxious about his meals and health, perpetually worrying that the weather was either too hot or too cold for him. When her daughter married she had another member, her daughter's husband, to worry about, especially when they were not living near at hand. Of course she heard from her elder son from time to time, and Old Lo and Tieh-ming used to tell her about him after they had visited him in the town. Gradually she acquired some vague conception of Kunming, but the city remained in her mind largely as the place whence came news of her son. As to Nanking, if her daughter had not gone to live there she would never have known that such a place existed. She had not the least idea how far it was from Kunming to Nanking, though someone had told her that one could do the journey by sea or by train in twenty or more days. Sometimes Old Lo would suggest jokingly that one day their daughter and son-in-law would invite them to Nanking, but the old wife only smiled and said that though she would like to see her children she could not travel by sea or train. As a matter of fact, she did not know what a sea steamer or a train was, and felt it was safest to refuse to have anything to do with them.

The sight of the village postman approaching was a very pleasant surprise. She had only made his acquaintance since her son and daughter had been away from home. Always she gave him a warm welcome and a motherly smile and made him a fresh cup of tea. The old postman invariably accepted the hospitality. He was in no hurry. In those parts it did not matter

if the villagers received their letters today or tomorrow so long as they got them some time. Very few of the inhabitants ever received any letters at all, and the postman would cheerfully spend a couple of days delivering half a dozen.

While he drank his tea, the postman, to show off his knowledge, remarked to the old woman that people in Kunming were talking a great deal about the Japanese-inspired troubles in Peking. To Lo's wife 'Peking' sounded much the same as 'Nanking', but she pulled a long face and enquired eagerly. 'Who are the Japanese? Why do they want to make trouble in Nanking? And what sort of trouble are they making? I must tell my daughter and son-in-law to keep away from them. Oh, dear me. There is always trouble in other places!'

'Not Nanking,' said the postman, 'I said Peking. And by the way, Peking is now called Peip'ing. As I said, the Japanese are making trouble there. The Japanese are the East-Ocean-devils who do not live in our land but want to get hold of it, so the townspeople say. I don't know what they want to do with it.'

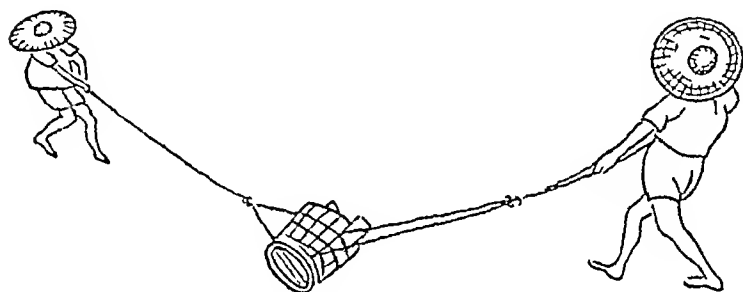
'I've heard of Peking,' rejoined the old woman, unabashed. 'Isn't it where the Emperor lives?'

'Ah! It used to be. Now we don't have an Emperor. The head of our country is called the President. He is in Nanking. Everyone knows our Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. You mustn't think our country still has an Emperor.' Obviously he had learnt a lot since he became a postman, so he talked to the old woman like a teacher to a pupil.

'Oh, no, certainly I won't think of the Emperor. I will say no more about him. We have a new head, not the Emperor,' answered Lo's wife quickly and firmly. She remembered that in her young days no one was even allowed to whisper the word Emperor, but for quite another reason. She smiled and smiled at the postman, begging him not to tell anybody. The postman assured her that she need not be afraid, for now anybody could criticise the head of the country freely. As he walked out of the

little house he told the old woman that Peking was a long way off. It might take seven days or more to get there by train from Nanking. This relieved her mind.

Still feeling happy at the thought of the letter from her daughter, Lo's wife quickly finished her cooking, and after eating a little herself she wrapped up the meal for her husband and son and took it in the basket to the field. Bustling along she presently came within sight of Old Lo and Tieh-ming. Standing apart, they were holding two pieces of thick rope supporting a



RAISING WATER

big wooden bucket hung between them. With this rudimentary apparatus they were raising water from a small pond in a low-lying field and tipping it out on to the higher field. This ancient device has been used by Chinese farmers for centuries, and though slow, if the workers partner one another skillfully, acting in close harmony, it can be efficient. Of course Tieh-ming, being only a boy, was not yet used to it, but he was making progress. Lo had to do most of the swinging of the bucket, but he was glad to see Tieh-ming learning so quickly.

Father and son stopped working as the old woman came up and began to lay out their meal on the grass. Each received a bowl and a pair of chopsticks and fell to with gusto. Old Lo had been working so hard that he was too tired to talk. Tieh-

ming was tired too, but he noticed that his mother was smiling more than usual and wondered why

Their meal over, Tieh-ming carried off the bowls and dishes to wash them in the little pond, and Lo took out his long bamboo tobacco pipe. He had a little difficulty in striking the flint against a small piece of iron, but presently he was smoking contentedly. When Tieh-ming returned the woman dramatically produced the letter and asked Tieh-ming to read it aloud. The old couple were naturally proud of Tieh-ming's ability to read, for previously they had had to find somebody in the village or town to read their letters to them. Lo gave the government full credit.

They were astonished to learn that the letter was not from their daughter and son-in-law, but from Old Li. Li said that his wife had given birth to a son, and that he wished to remind Old Lo of his promise to come and eat red eggs. Lo burst into a hearty laugh and said that he remembered making the joke. The woman was rather disappointed, but she smiled too. She was pleased to know that she had a new relation.

Presently father and son went to work again. The wife returned home to do washing, hanging the clean clothes in the sunshine on a long bamboo rod at the back of the house. Then she began to make straw hats and sandals for her menfolk, and she also did some weaving. When the light was no longer good enough for her aged eyes to see, she set to work to cook the evening meal.

The day's work over, Lo and his wife and son took their small stools outside and sat on the round patch in front of the house to enjoy the cool evening breeze. The murmur of the small stream nearby reached their ears and the hissing of the willow leaves lulled them. The sickle moon climbed up the sky as if to rival the stars. The hills slowly darkened and vanished. Old Lo stretched his legs and sighed deeply to indicate that he was recovering from his weariness.

Then the woman broke into speech, suggesting that they should send Old Li and their cousin a present for the new baby.

They had not often been called upon to send this kind of greeting and they felt themselves to be confronted with a big problem. All they had in the house was their daily necessities, things which the Li family would certainly have too. They valued money highly and did not think of spending any on the baby. In the end, at Lo's suggestion, they decided to send one of the young chickens which they had been planning to sell when the New Year Festival came round. Reluctantly the old woman agreed, and it was arranged that Tieh-ming should carry the chicken to the Li family next day. Lo really needed Tieh-ming's help in the fields, but it was felt that the act of courtesy was obligatory. The wife explained to Tieh-ming that it was the custom not to refuse to stay for a day or two if invited to do so.

So very early in the morning Tieh-ming set out. He reached the town before even all the shops were open. He found many more people in the streets than the last time he came. Most of them had big bundles of luggage on their shoulders or small cases in their hands. But their speech they did not sound like natives of the city, and Tieh-ming was puzzled. He could not know that they were the first batch of students and teachers moving south from the universities of Peking, for centuries the centre of Chinese learning. The Japanese had started war and were invading China from the north. The Japanese had machine-gunned and bombed the Nankai University at Tientsin on the pretext that it was a military objective. The education authorities had decided they must move, and some of them had selected Kiangling where they proposed to reorganise and continue their studies. This was all beyond the comprehension of Tieh-ming as he proceeded on his way to the house of the Li

own relatives continue to keep in touch with her. It indicates that she still has a good family of her own who might come to her help in case of need. Tieh-ming realised the cause of his Aunt's joy, but he could not know that the lady had another idea in her mind as well. As she looked at Tieh-ming she thought what a fine healthy boy he was, and what a very good match he would make for her daughter. Having attended the evening school she knew that parents were no longer supposed to arrange marriages for their children. Nevertheless, she could not help thinking that Tieh-ming and Hsiao-mei were of about the same age and that they would make a beautiful couple if they should want to marry. Of course, that was only fancy, and Tieh-ming could hardly be expected to know what was going on in her mind. Still——

The new baby was shown to Tieh-ming, and his aunt cooked something for him to eat. Then she sent him to find his uncle in the fields.

Li was very pleased to see Tieh-ming. On learning that the boy's father was still talking of their meeting the other day, Li laughed heartily. Tieh-ming began to help him in the fields and Li found that no kind of field-work was new to the boy. He began to like him more and more, and he entirely agreed with his wife that they should keep Tieh-ming for a day or two in order to create a friendship between the boy and their daughter. Though unaware of this, Tieh-ming was quite willing to stay.

After the mid-day meal he went on helping his uncle as he did his father at home. When it was dark the pair came back to find Hsiao-mei waiting for them at the door. Tieh-ming greeted her, asking her how she was, and Hsiao-mei returned the same enquiry. The simple, honest and loyal country boy, dressed exactly like an ordinary young farmer, might have felt embarrassed with Hsiao-mei, who was accustomed to work at the local co-operative society dressed in modern style and using cosmetics. If she had not immediately shown herself friendly and sociable, Tieh-ming would probably not have dared to talk

THE MEN OF THE BURMA ROAD

to her simply. But she was so natural that they were soon conversing animatedly. This delighted the old couple, who would have been still more pleased had they known that Tieh-ming was admiring Hsiao-mei's knowledge of up-to-date affairs.

Hsiao-mei told Tieh-ming of her work in the co-operative society. It was a new organisation in China, designed for the benefit of farmers. Any farmer could become a member simply by entering his name in a book. The society dealt in all kinds of things as well as money. Any member could bring the products from his land to exchange for the things he needed for daily use or for money to buy seeds. The society assisted its members to pay the government land tax too. If there was a drought or too much rain and the harvest was damaged, the society would lend its members money or help them to borrow it from the local farmers' bank. The money would be repaid from the proceeds of the next harvest. Altogether this society was solving a great many of the Chinese farmers' difficulties. Hsiao-mei's job was to register the names of the members, the amount of produce they brought, and the things they received in exchange. She enjoyed her work, and wanted Tieh-ming to try to change his father's old-fashioned ideas and persuade him to become a member himself. The talk ended on an unpleasant note for Tieh-ming. He was fascinated by all he heard, but he did not like to hear Hsiao-mei describe his father as an old-fashioned person.

'Look, Tieh-ming,' remarked Hsiao-mei, deftly changing the subject, 'I have a piece of news for you.'

'What?' enquired Tieh-ming.

'The director of my society has sent us a paper telling how the Japanese have invaded our country from the north at Tientsin and Peiping. They have machine-gunned our people and bombed our universities. Our soldiers in the north have resisted the invaders bravely but the enemy have better equipment. Yesterday our aeroplanes began to drop bombs on Shanghai and fierce fighting took place to prevent the enemy landing.'

'Why have the Japanese done this?' interrupted Tieh-ming 'I heard people talking about the war between China and Japan as I passed through the town this morning'

'That's just it Don't you remember that at school the teacher told us that the Japanese were a people living in the East Sea In the T'ang dynasty their ancestors sent a large number of their sons to learn our culture That was more than a thousand years ago But they did not study the Confucian idea of righteousness and benevolence in the conduct of life They have continually caused trouble around the borders of our country They tried to invade us at the end of the Ming dynasty about five hundred years ago They attacked us again and defeated us only about sixty years ago They took Formosa They took Korea They demanded that we should sign the twenty-one-items treaty with them They occupied our three Eastern Provinces—that is Manchuria Now they have bombed us without reason or warning They want to take over our whole country They do not want us to own our land Wherever they go they burn down houses and huts and loot everything They kill our elders and our youngsters They do most awful things to our women and girls, and eventually slaughter them to amuse themselves If they let us live they will treat us as slaves and order us to do unbelievable things which no upright human being could do We shall have no peace And we shall have no freedom If we want to keep our land, as it has been handed down to us by our ancestors for centuries, we must find means to protect and defend it We must be prepared for sacrifices We must help our soldiers to fight the war Oh, Tieh-ming, you and I must do something too!'

Though rather fragile, Hsiao-mei uttered these words with great emphasis, her face glowing with fervour She had learnt a great deal from her contact with the co-operative society people and had become extremely patriotic She felt now that she belonged to her country and that her every act must be for China She did not regard her youth as any handicap, and was

to seize every opportunity to interest girls and boys of her own age in the service of the nation. She certainly succeeded in gripping Tieh-ming's attention. His serious expression indicated how deeply he was thinking. When Hsiao-mei threw up her head to stress some point, Tieh-ming's body seemed to stretch too. When she raised her hand to gesticulate, Tieh-ming's eyes followed it. He did not dare to interrupt until she paused. Then he said he would do whatever he could and asked her what it would be best for him to try. She suggested he should go with her next day to a great mass demonstration against Japan which was to be held in the fore-court of the temple of Confucius, and he agreed. Old Li and his wife knew nothing of their talk, but were greatly pleased that the youngsters were becoming so friendly.

On the morrow Hsiao-mei and Tieh-ming found a great company of people assembled in the temple fore-court. A big platform had been erected in the centre, with many smaller platforms disposed around it. On the walls and pillars were pasted large posters bearing slogans such as 'Defend our Land', 'Drive out the Invaders', 'Rise and resist the Enemy', and so forth. People of all types kept pouring in—soldiers, students carrying their school-flags, tradesmen, farmers, shopkeepers. It was the first gathering of its kind ever to be held in Kunming. Many onlookers came with the same excited anticipation as that with which they had attended the education ceremony some time ago. They paid little attention to the posters, slogans and leaflets.

At the sound of a bell there was silence. Someone on the platform stood up and called upon all to pay respect, by bowing three times, first to the national flag and then to the Father of the Nation, the late Dr. Sun Yat-Sen who founded the Republic of China. Then all sang the Chinese National Anthem.

* San Min Chu Yi (Three Principles of the People),
Our aim shall be,

* Written by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen and translated by Tu Tsin-Hsiu

NEWS

To found a free land,
 World peace be our stand
 Lead on, Comrades,
 Vanguard ye are !
 Hold fast your aim by sun and star !
 Be earnest and brave,
 Your country to save,
 One heart, one soul .
 One mind, one goal !

Hsiao-mei and Tieh-ming had both learnt the anthem at school and they sang lustily with the rest, but quite a number of those who came from shops and villages did not know it and could not join in. The atmosphere of the assembly was tense. The chief organiser explained why the meeting had been convened, and he was followed by a large number of speakers. Some talked about Japanese ruthlessness. Some stressed the importance of everyone being patriotic and sacrificing himself to the nation, just as out of filial regard they would sacrifice themselves to save their fathers and mothers. Some urged mass support for the national leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Some demanded monetary contributions to meet the cost of fighting the aggressor. All spoke with a force and feeling that gradually moved the hearts of the audience. But none won more tears and sympathy from the simple-minded and largely illiterate mass than a man who showed his wounded arm, smashed by the machine-gun fire of a Japanese sentry when he tried to escape after seeing his father and mother shot dead in their home. Tieh-ming's blood boiled as he listened, and he longed to inflict the same treatment on the Japanese. He also wished he had money to offer, but having none he turned to look for Hsiao-mei.

To his surprise he found her on one of the smaller platforms addressing a crowd of her own. She possessed, besides her beauty and youth, remarkable powers of expression in simple language. She attracted many more people than the other subsidiary speakers. Some of them gathered round her out of

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simple curiosity, but, moved by her touching words, stayed to hear her. The daughter of peasant parents, she spoke the language commonly uttered by peasants. Having worked for the local co-operative society, she knew what the members expected of life. She had been chosen to speak for the society in order to rouse the feeling of the members and other peasants. She ended her speech with these simple words:

'We must thank our ancestors for leaving us our beautiful land. We must be filial to them and hold fast to that land. We must train our families to carry on the work of it. But all



LI HSIAO-MEI SPEAKING

the families which together form our nation must join to protect that land, for if the nation is in danger, how can we expect to save our families or our heritage? If we want to keep the land, every one of us must stand up now and drive out the invaders.'

The whole audience agreed with her. Tich-ming was so impressed that he tried to remember her words by heart. He was still thinking about them when he followed the demonstration on parade through the town. He admired Hsiao-mei's clever-

ness and thought her words expressed exactly the idea that his father Old Lo had so often uttered. He decided he must tell his father to help save the nation if he wished to keep his land. The demonstration passed the two ancient monuments, the Golden Horse and the Green Cock, and entered Chengyi Road. People kept shouting the slogans, and indeed the whole town went mad and talked of nothing but the fighting in north China until bed-time.

Before Tieh-ming left the house of the Li family, Hsiao-mei told him to tell all he had heard and seen in the town to his parents and make them aware of the coming danger. She promised to let him hear news of the war from time to time.

III

UNBELIEVABLE

TIEH-MING reached home just in time for the mid-day meal. His mother besieged him with questions about the baby. How big was he? Was his hair very black? Could the mother feed the child herself? All this was of no interest to Tieh-ming, who, while he was staying with the Li family, had only glanced at the baby once or twice. He handed his mother the box of new-laid eggs which was the return present from Li and his wife. The old woman put away the eggs in a drawer of the small table in the kitchen. Suddenly she cried to Tieh-ming: 'Dear me! I'm forgetting myself. You must be hungry, little son, after walking such a long way. Here is some food. When you have eaten it you must tell me more about the new baby.' Tieh-ming felt he must put an end to this subject once and for all, so he said unenthusiastically: 'The baby is fine. But, Mother—'

'How is he?' persisted the smiling mother. 'Does he know how to smile yet? Did he smile at you?'

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'Mother, I saw ever so many new people in town. They had all come from Peip'ing. That's where the Emperor lives. Oh!'

'Oh, I know. She suddenly lowered her voice and looked round the room, 'but we shouldn't speak of the Emperor now but a president.'

'Mother, we have no Emperor now but a president.' 'Oh, dear me, neither we have! We've got a president, the postman told me so.'

'Such a lot of people are in town, Mother. They say they are refugees from the North. The Japanese attacked them and burned their homes and killed—'

'Yes, the postman told me that the Japanese were making trouble in the north. I just can't understand why people want to make trouble for others when they could live and work for themselves peacefully and industriously. My son, you must remember that to be a man one must be honest, righteous and benevolent as our sage, Confucius, says. You are still young, but you will soon be a man. I hope you will then be good and not make trouble for others. Remember this, son.'

'Mother, the Japanese not only want to make trouble in the north, they want to take over our whole country. They want help our country. I heard many high officials say so. They told us to help our country. Hsiao-mei took me to a demonstration and parade—'

'Son, don't be foolish enough to believe things like that. Peking is a long long way from here—much farther north than Nanking where your elder sister is. How could the Japanese want our land? We have nothing to do with them. Don't be so foolish, son. Now get ready and take the mid-day meal out to your father in the field.' The old woman could not comprehend Tieh-ming's talk and was not interested.

'But, Mother, we must do something. Father and I must prepare to defend our land in case the Japanese come. Hsiao-mei and I went to the meeting at the Temple of Confucius and we heard the officials and speakers say that if we refuse to help ourselves now, it will be too late.'

The old woman seemed to have something on her mind while Tieh-ming continued. Suddenly she burst out

'You must not talk too much about town life in front of your father. He does not like it. Come, now, get ready to take this basket to him. Be quick! Don't tell your father what you saw in town. He will think you are too interested in town life and will not let you go there again.'

Tieh-ming was far from satisfied, but he had to go.

Old Lo was glad to see his young son back again. There was extra work to be done because the old harrow had broken, and the rest of the levelling would have to be carried out by hand before the young long rice-plants could be put in. Anticipating a scornful response from his father to the news he felt impelled to impart, Tieh-ming decided to broach the matter rather differently from the way he had broached it to his mother. At first Old Lo seemed to pay no attention, but Tieh-ming persisted, though in a low voice, for these new ideas were very much on his mind. After the meal Lo took out his bamboo pipe and had a smoke as usual. Suddenly he chuckled and said 'Don't believe them, son. It is unthinkable that the Japanese want our land. No one can have our land unless we don't want to keep it . . . Go on, now. Get to work in the field.'

Both his father and mother misunderstood what Tieh-ming meant by 'our land'. He meant, of course, the whole vast land of China—not just their own small farm near Kunming. The boy was unable to explain further, for it was time to begin the afternoon's work. He helped to level the field by trailing part of the broken harrow over the surface. Soon it would be mid-summer. The sun poured down, and Old Lo kept stretching his body and wiping his forehead. Tieh-ming felt hot too, but he showed no sign of it. He was still deep in thought and puzzled how to make his parents listen to him. Occasionally he paused in his work, but his father promptly urged him on again. The quiet of the countryside was broken only by the whirling scream of the cicadas, which did not seem to disturb

the silence but only, thought Tieh-ming, to increase his feeling of contrast with the noisy demonstration in the town. On and on father and son worked, until nearly dusk. Then they went home for the evening meal.

The village postman now often brought letters to the Lo family, but each time he came it was a disappointment to Tieh-ming's mother, who was always hoping for a letter from her daughter, whereas all the letters the postman brought came from Hsiao-mei to Tieh-ming. The boy had to read them aloud. Today's letter, after the customary greetings, summarised the latest news. Hsiao-mei described how the Chinese army had had to withdraw from Peip'ing, then from Chi-nan, then from Shanghai. She enclosed a newspaper cutting which gave a short account of how the 'Dare-and-die' battalion made the last stand at Shanghai. She went on to tell of the Japanese soldiers entering Nanking, looting, killing and treating women and girls with savagery. The letter ended, like every previous one, with the quotation 'Every person, old and young, must do his best to help the country to resist the invaders,' and a request to Tieh-ming to ask his parents to do what they could.

When Lo's wife heard about Nanking she was so worried about her daughter and son-in-law that she could pay no attention to the last few words. Lo himself had at first raised no objection to Tieh-ming receiving and reading the letters from Hsiao-mei. He simply ignored what they said. But when he saw that his wife was worried by them, he put a stop to the correspondence as far as his son was concerned. Fortunately, the postman always came in the day-time when Lo was working in the fields, and the mother was able to keep Hsiao-mei's letters for Tieh-ming without his knowledge. Lo was very fond of his wife and tried to ease her mind about their daughter, but the old woman no longer smiled her quiet, gentle smile.

The peaceful hills around the rice-fields had not changed. The farmers who had always worked there went on working as hard as ever. Lo and his son were no exception. But, somehow, Lo was not quite his old quiet and determined self. On

the one hand, he shared his wife's worry about their daughter and elder son, on the other, he was worried about his land. He had recently seen a number of young men, dressed like government officials, crossing his fields, and others stretching out long cords as if measuring something. He did not know the meaning of the word 'survey'. Once he asked some of them what they were doing, but could obtain no comprehensible answer. Lately these people had been appearing in the neighbourhood much too often for his liking, and on many nights Lo could not sleep for thinking of them.

One day he was asked to attend a meeting in the village. The local people had heard that the government was planning to build a road to Burma and they wanted to discuss ways and means of resisting the government's acquisition of their land for the purpose. Thus gave Lo a dreadful shock. Distraught at the thought of losing his land, he became furious with the government. Normally an ordinary peasant in China never wishes to do anything against the government, but this piece of land was so dear to Lo that he would have died rather than lose it, so he dreaded nothing. His eyes were red-rimmed with sleeplessness and worry. His wife, who knew his temper thoroughly, had never seen him so upset. But she kept the house running smoothly as usual and did not attempt to question him. On the day Lo went to the village Tieh-ming was left to get on with the work in the fields.

The meeting took place in a big ancestral temple of some family. Lo did not wait to be told what it was all about. He stated at once that he would rather be shot dead than give away his land. He added that his son had heard a rumour that it was the Japanese who wanted the land, but now it seemed it was their own government who were claiming it. Someone interrupted him, pointing out that it was just because the Japanese had attacked the nation that the government wanted to build this Burma Road through Kunming to bring war supplies from America and Britain, since nearly all the coast-line of China was in Japanese hands. China had not enough weapons

to continue resistance without supplies from her friends and allies. These words had no effect on Old Lo, who went on to declare that his piece of land had been handed down to him from generation to generation and that he must hold it as had his father and grandfather. He pointed out that Confucius had taught men to be filial and to obey their parents' wishes, and that if he gave up his land he would disobey his father and be an unfilial son. Would the government wish him to be an unfilial son? he asked, as if confident that the reply would be no. 'I declare that the government can have my head rather than my land!'

Fired by these straightforward words the rest of the land-owners rallied to him, and the government representative found himself in a difficult position. He mentioned that the government was prepared to make good the owners' loss either in money or by the grant of other pieces of land which would probably be better than the ones relinquished. Still Lo would not listen. He said that though his land might not be very good, it had belonged to his family for hundreds of years. It was his sole duty to tend it and keep it, and he would not let it go in any circumstances. The meeting reached a deadlock and the government representative went back to town. Of course, the whole proceedings were fully recorded in every daily newspaper, some of which went so far as to call Lo a traitor and urge the government to punish him forthwith.

When Old Lo got home from the meeting he was given not a moment's peace. Every kind of journalist and photographer wanted to see him. He disliked these strangers intensely and shouted at them that he wanted nothing whatever to do with them. But respect must always be accorded to journalists for their perseverance. No matter how rudely they are received they go on trying to get their 'stories'. Lo managed to shut the gate of his little hut, but it seemed unlikely that the hut would stand the storm of knocking and banging it received from outside. Lo and his wife feared it would fall in on them. Several owners of adjoining land who came to have a talk with Lo

could not get in, and even when Tieh-ming came back from the fields he had to wait outside until very late in the evening. It was misery.

There is a Chinese proverb which says '*Good luck does not come by twos misfortunes never fall singly*'. Lo's elder son, Kan-ming, had been ordered to the front. Owing to the Japanese superiority in equipment, particularly in the air, the Chinese army had had to withdraw again, and both sides had suffered great loss of life. The Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Chairman of Yunnan Provincial Government, General Lung Yun, to send more men to reinforce the new front. Lo Kan-ming was one of the first soldiers to go. Before setting out on the march from Kunming, every soldier was given two days' leave to say goodbye to his parents and relations. Lo Kan-ming reached home unexpectedly. His mother, delighted at seeing her elder son again, smiled and busied herself cooking special food for him. Kan-ming knew that his departure for the north would be a great shock to his mother and cause her pain, so he did not mention the matter until his father and young brother came home from the fields.

Kan-ming noticed a great change in Old Lo's face. New wrinkles had appeared on his forehead, his eyes had sunk deeper into their sockets, and he kept coughing. He nodded casually to his elder son.

Tieh-ming would like to have flown to his brother's side, but the tense feeling in the room prevented him.

After the evening meal Lo took out his long bamboo pipe again and smoked, but he coughed terribly. The mother occasionally gave a long sigh and said in a low voice how she longed for news of her daughter. Thoroughly upset at the unhappiness which his announcement was bound to cause, Kan-ming at length told his parents that he was ordered to Nanking.

It had never occurred to the mother that her elder son would ever really have to fight and kill people, and when she heard his words she slipped off her bamboo stool in a faint.

Kan-ming quickly told Tieh-ming to heat some water for her, and was putting his mother to bed when Lo suddenly stood up, flew at Kan-ming and struck him in the face. When he saw his father's anger and his elder brother standing there motionless, Tieh-ming let the cup fall from his hand to the ground.

'You—you ungrateful son!' cried Old Lo, his head thrust forward, his eyes starting. 'You have come home to kill your mother before you go away to kill somebody else. You have come to tell me about the Japanese again. I am being worried to death with the Japanese, and I don't want to have anything whatever to do with them. Go away. Go as far as you like. Your mother and I and your young brother do not want to see you any more.' Here he was overcome by a fit of coughing. 'You ungrateful wretch! Your mother and I had almost unbearable difficulty in bringing you up in the hope that you would make our family name continue to flourish, and would work to maintain the land left to us by our honourable and revered ancestors. But you wanted to become a soldier and went away and left us. Confucius says that one should never go far from one's parents while they are still alive. You unfilial boy! It is not my wish, nor our ancestors' wish, that you should kill others. Be killed yourself first! Go away, I don't want you. Go away! Go away!' The old man had exhausted himself with shouting and coughing and panting. He fell heavily into his seat.

Meanwhile the mother regained consciousness and half-opened her eyes. 'Kan-ming, my dear son, you are still here,' she murmured in a low voice, stretching out her hand feebly to touch Kan-ming's. 'Kan-ming, my son, I don't want you to go to the war, but as you are a soldier now I suppose you must obey orders. How I wish they hadn't ordered you to go! How I wish——' Tears streamed from her eyes and dropped on to Kan-ming's hand.

Kan-ming tried to explain. 'It is not merely because I am ordered that I must go to the war,' he said. 'I am a Chinese

citizen and must serve my country. Every one of us has his duty to do in the fight with the Japanese, who have

'Sh sh' broke in the mother before Kan-mung could finish his sentence. 'Don't mention the Japanese. Father does not like it.' Obviously only the one word 'Japanese' had penetrated into her brain.

'Oh, well, perhaps it is a good thing that you are going to Nanking,' she suddenly said aloud, looking a little more cheerful. 'When you get there you must go and see your sister and let me know at once how she is.'

Old Lo was still coughing and panting. Kan-mung's distress was so great he felt he could not stay another moment. Picking up his belongings, he said goodbye to his parents. Old Lo did not speak, but the mother wiped her eyes and said, 'Let us know soon about your sister and be home quickly when your duty is finished.'

Kan-mung held Tich-mung's hand very tightly as they walked out of the house together. Before they had gone far he said, 'Now, brother, I am going to fight the Japanese. You know how bad they are. We must drive them out of our country, otherwise we shall have no peace and no chance to work. Father and Mother are too old to understand. I must go now, but I hope I shall come back one day to help you in the fields. If I should fail to return you will be the only one to look after our parents. Be loyal to them, Tich-mung, so that I can feel easier in carrying out my duty. To be loyal to the same time. You, brother, will be loyal to home. I will be loyal to the nation. Goodbye, Tich-mung, goodbye, goodbye.'

Before Tich-mung could speak a word in reply Kan-mung rushed down the road to where two hills met. He was gone, and Tich-mung turned back with his young heart in a tumult.

Next morning Old Lo lay in bed late recovering from the emotional storm of the previous evening. His wife, though she was not well either, had to get through her usual daily work,

She began to cook something for Tieh-ming to eat before he went to work in the fields. The boy wanted to stay at home in case his parents needed help, but his mother sent him out, saying that that would please his father much more than being served with tea and tobacco. And indeed it was an important time for farmers in the fields. So Tieh-ming went.

While the old mother was cleaning the rooms she heard a knock at the door. As usual she thought it was the postman with a letter from her beloved daughter. When she opened the door she found Old Li standing there. She had met him once before, just after he had married Lo's cousin. Now he was so changed that until he spoke she did not recognise him. He stepped into the house, and the woman enquired after the baby and the mother.

Li replied shortly. This was not a social call. Li would never have wasted his valuable working hours in paying visits. He had been urged by his daughter Hsiao-mei to come and persuade Lo to accept the government's offer of another piece of land in exchange for his own. The Japanese had been menacing every possible route and sea-port by which war supplies from America and Britain could be transported into the interior of China. The Burma Road had to be built, and built quickly. Many daily papers were blaming Lo for impeding the effort, and urging the government to commandeer his land immediately. Hsiao-mei also knew that her society and other organisations were planning a meeting to demand that those owners who were preventing the building of the Burma Road should be punished. For this reason she had begged her father to go and see Lo about it.

Though Lo was weak and in bed, his temper was still fiery. He shouted at Li. 'The government has taken away my elder son. Is that not enough? What more do they expect from a poor farmer? My land? No! They can have my head.'

Li was taken unawares by this outburst, and he went home without achieving his purpose.

When Tich-ming came back and heard that Uncle Li had been, he wished he could have seen him and asked about Hsiao-mei



CARRYING SMALL STONES

IV

AT LAST

SEED-TIME and harvest, like time and tide, wait for no man and Old Lo, whether he was well or ill, had to get up and work in his fields. He did not cough so much now, and he did not talk much either, he worked on in silence.

Tich-ming was less worried about the turn of affairs than his parents, but even his young heart was tense. Unless he was asked about something concerning the field-work he too hardly spoke. This was not good for a young mind, but there was so much work to be done that the time slipped by, day after day.

Lo's wife still hoped anxiously for a letter from her long-silent daughter. One night brooding over the subject in bed, her lips kept repeating, as if that might bring it about, that a letter would come soon, probably tomorrow. She grew

drowsy Then, to her great surprise and joy, she saw her daughter coming towards her down the road where the two hills met and where Kan-ming had said goodbye to Tieh-ming At first she thought her eyes must be deceiving her, but then she noticed someone following her daughter It must be her husband Ah! and he was holding a baby—her grandson The party came slowly up to the house, where the old mother was waiting smiling to receive them. Presently they were approaching the gate With a cry of overwhelming joy the old woman ran forward, but her foot struck a small stone and she fell heavily, striking her face on the ground with such force that one of her two remaining teeth was broken and hurt her extremely The pain woke her and she sat up to face the drear reality left empty by her dream

Feeble moonlight filtered stealthily into the little room through the tiny window The old woman's face was wet with tears, due both to pain and to the dream She would not tell her husband what she had dreamt, for according to the traditional belief it would be interpreted as signifying that her daughter was either dead or in grave danger In the dream she herself had lost a piece of bony substance, a tooth, and as in China parent and child are held to be as closely attached as bone to flesh, she supposed that her 'bony substance', her daughter, had been lost for ever too But she would not let herself believe the superstition, and continued to expect the arrival at any moment of her daughter with her husband and baby

Every day she leant against the lintel waiting for a letter Once or twice the postman seemed to be approaching, but he passed by to some other house, throwing her a simple greeting

At last one afternoon a fat letter did find its way to Lo's wife, but it was not from her daughter Well, she reflected, a letter from her son Kan-ming was better than nothing Had he reached Nanking yet and seen his sister? She was in a fever to know the contents of the big envelope

At the end of the day Old Lo and Tieh-ming came back

from the fields. First they had to be given their meal. The days were shorter now and it was chilly outside in the evenings, so the old mother lighted the little oil-lamp, the only one in the house, and brought out the letter for Tich-ming to read.

It started with the usual greetings and enquiries about the parents' health, and then described the long march Kan-ming had had to endure. He had seen many strange things and cities and met many kinds of people on the journey. All of them had been most friendly and had welcomed the soldiers enthusiastically. He was well fed, he said, and ready to beat the enemy. It had been intended that the army to which he belonged should go to Nanking, but it had stopped at Hankow, Nanking having already fallen into Japanese hands. But he had had news of his sister and her husband and baby. While the battle was raging at Shanghai, his brother-in-law had joined the 'Dare-and-die' corps, which was then heroically defending the city's last stronghold. When an order for general withdrawal was received from headquarters, the 'Dare-and-die' corps remained to cover the retreat. Unhappily Kan-ming's brother-in-law was killed. His sister had not taken her baby to Shanghai, she had remained with the child at Nanking, where she was without news of her husband. Soon Nanking too was threatened. Japanese aircraft kept dropping heavy bombs on the city and countless civilians lost their lives. Eventually the city was occupied. As this happened suddenly, most of the population were trapped inside the city walls, Kan-ming's sister and her baby among them. Luckily she lived to the north of the city near an American church. They were allowed to move inside the church for protection when the enemy marched in, but the Japanese soldiers paid no respect to anyone, not even to their own commanders. They were savage and barbarous. They shot any young man at sight, as if killing were a game. They raped women and girls, old and young alike. One evening about fifty of them dashed into the American church shouting hysterically for women. The priests had no power to check them. But thank God, said Kan-ming, my sister did not fall

into the tiger's mouth and bring the black spot on our family. She left the baby in the hands of the American priest and, escaping through the back door of the church, drowned herself in Lake Chuan-Wu. Kan-ming said he had heard that about a hundred young women and girls drowned themselves in that lake in one night. After a few days a heavy bomb fell on the roof of the church and everyone, including the baby, was killed. 'It is clear enough what the Japanese are doing to us. We must fight them.'

Before Tich-ming could finish reading his mother broke into bitter weeping. Nothing could staunch her grief, and Tich-ming's own feelings were such that he could only weep with her. Old Lo said nothing, but he kept sighing deeply. He had had far too many troubles in his life already, and was too familiar with sorrow to be able to shed tears now. The house, with its dim little light, looked grimmer than ever, and the three occupants sat on and on, as if waiting for something to reverse their terrible news, and gradually the lamp flickered out.

At last it was dawn. When one does not die in the night one must get up in the morning to face life again. Old Lo and Tich-ming left for the field without eating anything. The old mother's heart was too heavy for her to get up and cook. She still sat where she had been when Tich-ming read the letter. The pain of her daughter's fate had penetrated not only into her mind but into her whole body, and she had not strength to move. Somehow, she told herself, she must prepare food and take it to the field for her husband and son. She roused herself slowly, muttering prayers that her elder son might come home safely. Meanwhile she hoped for another letter.

The government's plan to seize the property of Lo and other recalcitrant farmers hung fire, but there was an unrestful feeling in the air. The Japanese had disturbed the whole of China, though the fighting was still only in the north. Other land-owners came to talk to Lo, but he gave always the same answer—that he had made up his mind and no one could change it. What that decision was they did not know, but

they supposed it to be what he had declared at the meeting, so they felt quite safe themselves in maintaining their own refusal.

In view of the urgency and importance of the road, the government could have used force, but it preferred to try once more to gain the people's willing assent. It was announced that another representative was being sent to hold a fresh meeting. The rumour circulated among those concerned and they came to see Old Lo, asking what should be done about it. But Lo replied that he had nothing new to say and went on working in his fields. His wife overheard the delegation talking and, in fear of more trouble, tried to persuade Lo to change his mind, but in vain.

One evening, not long before Old Lo and Tieh-ming were due to come home, a government official found his way to the house. He asked very politely for Lo, but the wife, who had never before had contact with an official, thought that he might get her husband into difficulties and evaded saying whether he was at home or not. But she had, of course, no means of stopping Lo from coming in from the fields, and a moment later he appeared at the door with Tieh-ming. Guessing that the official had come about the land question, Lo gave him a nod. The old woman, holding her breath in suspense, sighed with relief when it turned out that the official had not come about the land at all. He had brought a decree from the Central Government to convey to the Lo family its satisfaction with their son. Opening a scroll, he read aloud:

'Lo Kan-ming, twenty-two years old, a native of Yunnan Province and a soldier of the Seventh Army, fought heroically in the defence of Teh-an, near Kuukiang. On receiving the order to thrust into the enemy's line, he led his party forward, and the action resulted in a big defeat for the enemy. As he was in the front line, he received many wounds and died on the battle-field. The President of the Central Government thanks him for his bravery and patriotism in the nation's life-and-death struggle and has awarded him the Pao-Hsing (Precious

Star) medal in appreciation of his sacrifice for China. His name will be glorious in the history of the nation. The President also thanks Lo Kan-ming's parents for their unselfishness in giving their beloved son to the nation in this unprecedented struggle. A sum of three thousand dollars from the national treasury is to be given to them, not as compensation for their loss, but in recognition of their merit in co-operating with the nation.

No one spoke in response to the decree. The house darkened, and even the official could not help sharing the family's grief, and unconsciously heaved a sigh himself. Presently he placed the money on the table and got up to go. Wisely enough Tich-ming escorted him a little way. When he got back he found his mother weeping loudly and whispering that she did not care about the fame and money, though she had never dreamed of so much money before, but only about her beloved son. Old Lo still said nothing. It was another terrible evening for Tich-ming.

Next morning Lo's house was again besieged by journalists wanting to know about the boyhood of his heroic son. What inhumanity they showed to these two heavy hearts! One daily newspaper in the town printed a headline 'Unpatriotic parents have patriotic son'. They had not forgotten that Lo and his wife had refused to give up their land for the building of the Burma Road.

The proposed meeting to settle the land problem could not now be long delayed. The news from the front was worse, and the Generalissimo Chiang-Ku-shek was urging that the Burma Road be finished within a year. Old Lo prepared to go to the meeting still adamant in his opinion.

He was just leaving home when suddenly Li, looking pathetically agitated, appeared before him. Lo nodded and moved on. But Li grasped his right hand and would not let him go until he had imparted his own news. 'My wife is dead—your cousin,' he said hurriedly. 'Do you understand—your cousin has been killed by the Japanese. An airplane dropped

a big bomb right on my house and killed my wife and my little son. I was working in the field when I heard the noise and was hurrying back when another bomb fell in my field and ruined all my crops. I have been to tell my daughter to stay away. Now I have no home, no wife, no son, and no land. His voice broke and he wept terribly.

This news would previously have been a great shock to Lo, and, but for his own recent experiences, he would have been inclined to disbelieve it. Now he blinked once or twice, and then stood staring at Li appalled. He was recalling how happy and jolly Li had been only a few months ago. His cousin had been happy too, he remembered how she had enjoyed his joke about the coming of the baby son. He could not believe that Li's beautiful fields could be spoiled by anything but drought or flood. Then he thought of his daughter, his elder son, his own centuries-old land. At last he could think no more. He felt only a great stone in his heart. Turning away from Li he began to walk on.

'You are so cold,' said Li, still weeping. He thought Lo felt no sympathy for him. 'You have no heart.'

But Old Lo was silent because he knew it would be useless to give Li words of consolation. So he let him weep until he could weep no more for exhaustion. Then he told his wife to get him to bed for a while.

The old woman had been ready to pour out all her own sorrow when she saw Li at the door. But when Li had spoken her tongue seemed fixed in her mouth and she could not murmur a word. Presently Lo left the house for the meeting.

How had such a fate overtaken Li's wife and son? It was because the Japanese navy were now blockading the entire coast of China, and the Chinese could therefore only get war supplies from America and Britain through Hanoi in Indo-China. Most of these supplies came through by the Yunnan-Haiphong Railway. At that time Indo-China was a neutral territory, under French protection, and all the Japanese could do to pre-

vent supplies reaching the Chinese was to bomb the terminus of the railway in China. It was still very difficult for Japanese aircraft to operate so far from their bases, and this was their first attempt to do so. Li lived near the railway station, and his wife, his baby son and his land had accordingly suffered this terrible fate. Not much damage was done to the station, but the bombing made the inhabitants realise that another route for China's war supplies was urgently needed. The building of the Burma Road must not be delayed in any circumstances.

At the meeting the government representative explained the war situation in detail and with feeling, in order to win over the hearts of the local people. He recounted the past relations between China and Japan, showing that the Chinese are a peace-loving people having no desire to interfere in other nations' affairs, whereas the Japanese had frequently tried to invade China by force of arms and assume the leadership of Asia. He described with tears the atrocities which the Japanese had committed in the occupied Chinese cities, towns and villages, the killing of poor and innocent people with no respect for age or sex. He reminded his audience how contrary all this was to the Confucian ideas so deeply rooted in every Chinese mind. He quoted Confucius' saying that 'all men are brothers', and went on to urge that brothers should help each other to resist aggression. He urged the audience to realise that the proposed Burma Road was the life-line by which China could win freedom, and emphasised that the sons and daughters of those present must prepare to accept every sacrifice and give any help required of them. Surely no one, he concluded, would sit and wait for death unless his illness were known to be incurable.

Most of the audience, stirred to anger and enthusiasm, were ready to promise any help. But there were still a few selfish people, so short-sighted that they could not see beyond the boundaries of their tiny property. There was also a group of complacent ones who refused to believe that Japan could con-

'I am a very ignorant farmer,' he said in a low voice, all the vigour he had shown at the last meeting seeming to have left him. 'I only want to remain a simple farmer,' he continued. 'The land I have now comes from my ancestors. I promised my father to such to it when he died. I want to be a filial son to my father as Confucius teaches. I want this piece of land to remain in the Io family for ever.' The audience rustled and stirred. Some were startled, some smiled. 'But' he went on, 'I have never wanted to do harm to others, and I dislike having harm done to me by others. I live simply, as a simple farmer should live. I work and rest according to my needs. I pay the tax which is due to the government. What more can you expect an ignorant, poor person like me to do?'

'Now'—he raised his voice a little—'now my work has been disturbed. Now I am restless. Now my heart has been wounded. Who has done all this to me?' He raised his voice further. 'Who has done all this to me, I say? It is not

the government.' The audience was growing alarmed 'It is not the government. It is the Japanese. The Japanese have killed my son-in-law in Shanghai. The Japanese have killed my daughter in Nanking. The Japanese have killed my grandson in Nanking. The Japanese have killed my cousin of the Li family in Kunming. The Japanese have killed my cousin's son. The Japanese are forcing our government to build the Burma Road. It is the Japanese who want our land, not the government. I, a feeble old man, cannot avenge myself on them, so I must let the government do it for me. Therefore I now give all my land to the government. I want no compensation. And I, my wife and my young son, will give our labour to the building of the Burma Road. I now give my son to the government to demand of him any sacrifice that may be necessary for the nation. Every one of us must give up his land to the nation. We must do it now. There is no time to waste.'

He finished abruptly. The assembly was stirred and shaken by his simple and moving words. They rose in unison and cried that they would do the same as Lo.

After a little while they clustered round Lo to condole with him in all his grief. Amid the confusion and excited talk the journalists were busy as usual. They jostled round Old Lo in a circle. Extra editions of their papers were issued at once and all the headlines declared Old Lo to be the greatest patriot in Yunnan. At the time, Lo knew nothing of this, for he could not read. If he could, he would have laughed sardonically at the changeability of journalists' minds. But later he heard that big pictures of himself, with fulsome wording underneath, had appeared, and that troubled him, for he feared people would think he was sacrificing his land for the sake of notoriety or indirect profit. The adjectives of the journalists he ignored. abuse or praise—it was all one to Lo.



TAKING A LITTLE REST

V

ANOTHER PROBLEM

IT was getting dark as Lo took the footpath to his home, and presently the sound of chattering human voices echoing in his head gave way to the pleasant clamour of a huge flock of homing birds. The sound sent a shaft through his heart, reminding him that he would not be returning to his own home many more evenings. But he comforted himself with the thought that there would still be many of earth's creatures who could continue peacefully in their homes.

Now and then he coughed. It was his habit to smoke his long bamboo pipe with the object of soothing his cough, whereas in fact it obviously aggravated it. He now took out the pipe as usual, and his steps slowed while he knocked out the ashes and recharged the bowl. Then he had to stop altogether because he could not find his flint. He searched his pockets in vain. Perhaps he had forgotten to bring it with him when he hurried away from home.

Then his worn old eyes caught the glint of the sparkling sunset over the hills. All his life this familiar sight had been for him the sign that it was time to go home from the fields. Normally he paid no more heed to it than one pays to a clock now it seemed to hold some thoughtful meaning for him. Above the sunset the clouds hung dark and grey, and Old Lo knew that this meant rain during the night or in the early morning. The skyline of the hills was sharp against the sunset but the valleys were enveloped in darkness. Lo's own fields were quite near now. Instinctively he changed his direction towards them instead of to his house. No one else was about. He reached the spot on the fence of his field where he had always been accustomed to sit, and paused to stare at the stubble which was all that remained after the gathering of the rice harvest. He thought of nothing for a while. Then, standing up decisively, he walked round the field as if giving it a thorough inspection. Occasionally he stooped to pick up a handful of earth and scrutinise it carefully. Finally he hesitated, took a deep breath, and hurried away. He had made up his mind not to see his land again.

While Old Lo was hastening home, his wife with Old Li and Tieh-ming was waiting patiently for him to begin the evening meal. It would be impossible to exaggerate how worried the old woman was. The journalists and photographers, having had little success with Lo at the meeting, had rushed to Lo's house, and she had had great difficulty in getting rid of them. Nothing but the fact that their stomachs were empty persuaded them to go away in the end. Now it was getting late, and she did not know what could have happened to her husband. Remembering the last meeting, she recalled what a temper her husband had returned from it in. And again her thoughts returned to her daughter and baby grandson, and most of all to her elder son Kan-ming. A cold pain was creeping deeper and deeper into her heart and she wanted to bow her head on the table. But with a relative as a guest in the house she could not give way to her sorrow. Besides, Li seemed to be feeling a

little better and the old woman did not want to upset him again

Li was still pondering in amazement upon the happy family life that had been his and the pleasure he had taken in his baby son and his fruitful land only a day ago. There remained his daughter to be thought of, and it struck him that it would probably be good both for his family and the Lo family if she were to be betrothed to Tich-ming. He, perhaps, could come and live here and help Lo in the fields until the youngsters reached marriageable age. Of course, Li knew that this would have to be talked over with Lo and also with his daughter, who, with her modern education, might not agree to such an arrangement.

During the long period of waiting Tich-ming said nothing. Too hungry to move, he squatted on a stool with his back against the table and presently dropped wearily to sleep. He was awakened by his father's entrance. To the surprise of all, Lo did not look as worried as when he set out. His wife felt a weight lifted from her heart. They sat down to their meal at once.

While they ate Lo described what had happened at the meeting, emphasising that he felt the only way to save the family land was to give it to the government, just as the only way to avenge the untimely death of his people was to help to beat the Japanese. He spoke slowly, giving full weight to every word, but he roused the feelings of his listeners enormously. When he mentioned the death of his daughter and son the old mother opened her two little eyes wide and screamed with anger. She cried out that she would make any sacrifice to help the government. The emotional Li jumped from his seat and shouted that he would not be left behind. 'But,' he added hesitantly, 'I think the future of your son and my daughter should be settled. Perhaps they could be betrothed immediately, so that we could feel comfortable about them.' Lo's wife entirely agreed. The suggestion seemed to have touched the right spot in her heart at the right moment. Lo, for a time, said nothing. 'It is not a problem to be dealt

with now,' he presently said steadily 'We must hurry to help the government first. As a matter of fact, I have given Tieh-ming to the nation and it is for the government to decide what he is to do next'

'Very well, I will give Hsiao-mei to the nation too,' remarked Li jocularly

Nobody could help laughing. This was the first lightening of the grief-laden atmosphere of the house

Next morning Hsiao-mei came to see her father. She displayed wonderful self-control over the death of her mother and baby brother. She had now resolved, she said, to be trained as a nurse and to go to the front, she had made up her mind to give herself entirely to the service of the nation. Old Li at once shouted out that that was just what he wanted her to do. Again his enthusiasm made Lo and his wife laugh

Tieh-ming laughed too. He had not entirely understood what his elders were saying about himself and Hsiao-mei, and he greeted her quite straightforwardly

Hsiao-mei had heard all about Lo giving his land and Tieh-ming to the nation. She began to talk a great deal, using such newly-acquired words as 'Democratic nations', 'Aggressors', 'Totalitarians', 'Axis', 'Socialism', 'Fascism', 'Communism', 'Nazis', and so on. This soon exhausted Old Lo's patience. Standing up he said 'For goodness' sake stop using all these queer words. I just want to beat the Japanese, who have killed my relatives and other fellow human beings'

Just after Hsiao-mei left the house, someone else arrived. It was the government representative who had been at the meeting. He explained that General Lung Yun, Chairman of the Yunnan Provincial Government, having heard of Lo's patriotic gift to the nation, wished to see him personally to convey to him the government's gratitude. This embarrassed Old Lo dreadfully. He had no wish to be thanked in person, but at the same time he felt it would be impolite or disobedient not to accept the invitation of such a high official. So he agreed to accompany the representative, but on condition that he should not have to face

any journalists or photographers at the official residence. The condition was accepted and Lo left for the town.

After exchanging a few words with the Chairman, he produced from his huge cloth-bag the three thousand dollars which had been given to him in recognition of his elder son Kan-ming's heroic conduct in the war. 'Now, your Excellency,' he said, 'I have given my land and my house to the nation, and my wife and younger son are going to work on the road, so we do not need this money. But a lot of material will have to be bought for the building of the road, and the government may be able to make good use of the money.' The Chairman was both surprised and deeply moved. He said that if every citizen in the country would follow Lo's example the defeat of the Japanese would be speedy.

Just as Lo was about to leave Government House, two foreigners entered. They were journalists, Mr Frank Wood, the Far Eastern correspondent of a big London daily newspaper, and Mr Donald Coward, the Far Eastern correspondent of one of the most powerful New York papers. Both had been in China for many years before the Japanese invasion, and had travelled widely throughout China. Being in Kunning they had heard of the building of the Burma Road and were now anxious to secure the first authoritative and original story about it. They knew of Lo's obstinate refusal to give up his land, and on reading in the local paper that morning something about his patriotic action, they were puzzled, and wondered if they had not misinterpreted the Chinese characters. It was a piece of wonderful luck for them to hear a rumour that Lo was actually in the Government building, and they were very disappointed to be refused a personal interview with the old peasant. They asked if they could photograph him, but this too was refused. By way of explanation they were told that it had been agreed beforehand that no one was to be allowed to bother him. It was altogether beyond their comprehension. Here was someone who did not want to advertise himself! China was still mysterious to them even after years of residence.

Nevertheless they were not going to let such a wonderful opportunity for a 'story' go without a struggle. So, after one more unsuccessful attempt to interview the old farmer, each returned to his hotel and invented a thrilling story about Old Lo's life and his recent reactions to the government's demand for his land. One described him as stern, sinister and obstinate, with long whiskers like those of the characters in 'Chu Chin Chow', and went on to describe how Lo had brought with him to the meeting a small knife hidden in his shirt, and that was why the government representative could not force him to give up his land. It seemed that Lo had later gone to worship the wooden idol in the local temple and conceived the idea that he would be heavily punished by divine power if he tried to keep his land, and it was for that reason that he consented to give way after all. The other journalist depicted Lo as a faithful Confucianist who was sometimes cleverer than Confucius. He did not want to part with his land because of his belief in the religion of ancestor-worship, but later gave way before the tyrannical pressure of the government. Both stories were well-presented and sounded plausible to foreigners. They were published in London and New York with more or less the same comment that Chinese people are individualists and fatalists. Of course, Mr Wood and Mr Coward knew how they had written these stories, but they had their reputation as experts on Far Eastern affairs to keep up. But the stories did not harm Old Lo, who could not read his own language and never dreamed of anything being written about him in any other language.

Next day Mr Wood and Mr Coward came to Government House again. This time they wanted to know the plan for the building of the proposed Burma Road. They supposed that the Chinese Government must have set up committees and gathered experts from all over the country to discuss the construction of bridges, the distribution of labour, and the expenditure on materials. The road, from Kunming to Burma, would be roughly 700 miles long, and they recognised that it constituted a formidable undertaking. To their astonishment and disap-

pointment no information could be gleaned beyond the fact that the road was ordered to be built and that the work would begin in a day or two. They could get no rough sketch of the route, nor find any competent engineer to talk about the construction. They concluded that the Chinese Government must be anxious to conceal the secret of the building and must really be as inscrutable as they were reputed.

In reality the local government knew no more than the journalists. They had been ordered to build the road as soon as possible and that they were going to do. They had no detailed plan, for they had had no time to think one out. They had difficulties enough in recruiting labour and providing food and shelter, without troubling themselves about a 'plan'. Having little idea how to go about building a road 700 miles long over rough, mountainous and rocky country in a very short time, they decided to start first and try to solve the technical problems as they arose. It sounds madness to committee-minded and machine-minded people of the West, to whom it inevitably foretells chaos. But news of military reverses kept coming in and the road had to be made.



HACKING ROCK

VI

A GREAT MULTITUDE

THERE was a great multitude of people in Kunming. Every street and lane was packed. The whole aspect of the city had changed. It was neither like it had been a year ago, nor like it was yesterday. Every day fresh streams of people arrived from the battlefields of the northern provinces: Hopei, Honan, Shangtung, Kiangsu, Chekiang, Anhui, Hupeh, Kiangsi. The greatest mass migration in Chinese history was going on. Along mountain footpaths, through damp and miasmatic jungles, over rocky peaks, beside dangerous precipices, and upon the waters of small river tributaries, this great mass of peace-loving Chinese people had trekked day and night, month after month, towards the south-west provinces. Coming from such widely separated parts of the vast area of China they spoke many different dialects, but only a few needed to make themselves understood to one another by means of the universal Chinese written language. Kunming had become a 'cosmopolitan' centre, of greatly enhanced importance since the seat of the Central Government had been moved from Hankow in Hupeh to Chungking in Szechwan, for Szechwan borders Yunnan. An air line runs daily from Kunming to Chungking, a distance of about 700 miles, and a highway has already been constructed.

Most of this great mass of people in Kunming had suffered severely at the hands of the Japanese. They had lost either their parents or grandparents, or their children or grandchildren. Rendered homeless and restless, they understood the ruthlessness of the Japanese militarists well enough to feel resolved to do anything to beat back the invaders. So, in response to the government's call for labour to build the Burma Road, great numbers had come. In a few hours Government House was surrounded with crowds of them. Most declared that they



DEMONSTRATORS PARADE THROUGH CHENGYI ROAD



MASS MIGRATION BY LAND AND WATER

wanted no wages, only food and shelter. A good many had been renowned scholars in their native cities, but now mingled indistinguishably with the cosmopolitan mass. Class had vanished. Every member of the vast throng was filled with the will 'to build the Burma Road to bring war supplies from America and Britain to beat the common enemy'.

Few now bothered about Old Lo. He and his wife made no impression on the crowd waiting eagerly to enter their names as volunteer labourers. Tieh-ming and Li had come too. The old couple could see Li standing breathless not far from them, but they looked in vain for their son. The woman began to worry that he might have got lost in the crowd, but Lo stopped her moaning by saying that she must bear every sacrifice if she was to carry through her desire to help build the road. 'Tieh-ming is a clever little fellow,' he remarked smilingly. 'He knows how to look after himself.' This was the first nice word Old Lo had ever spoken about his sons. The mother was delighted and cheered up at once.

Actually Tieh-ming had been pushing and dodging through the crowd towards the government officials, one of whom he took down his name and age. But when the boy mentioned his father, Old Lo, the officials realised that he was the son of the man who had given his land to the nation, and they all smiled and congratulated him. While they were talking, Tieh-ming seized the opportunity to get the officials to enter also the names of his father and mother and Uncle Li. It was irregular, but they complied in order to show their appreciation of Lo's patriotism. Quite satisfied, Tieh-ming fought his way out and went in search of his parents to tell them that they need not wait longer. When he reached them they nodded their appreciation of his cleverness. Uncle Li had still to be found, and when he was traced the four walked home to pack their things for their new task. They knew that they would have nowhere to store their possessions while working on the road. They did not need much. They knew that they would have Lo very glad to have Li with him, and produced his old

working clothes for Li to use, the latter having lost everything in the bombing. Tieh-ming made a small bundle for himself which he could carry on his shoulders. It contained no more than a pair of straw sandals and an old suit of his father's which had been cut down for him.

Only the woman could not make up her mind what to take and what to leave behind. She knew everything in the house so intimately, every object was rich with associations. Some things had been given her by her daughter and son-in-law when they left Kunming for Nanking. As they were now dead, the old mother would have liked to keep their gifts in memory of them. The same question arose over an old pair of shoes that had belonged to Kan-ming. He had forgotten to take them with him at the end of his last visit, which had ended so tragically with Lo's outburst, and ever since she had been insisting that they must be sent on to him. But every time she broached the subject Lo flared up. He said there was no need to bother, and, indeed, but for her fierce insistence, would have removed the shoes, in order to leave nothing to remind her of Kan-ming. Thinking of all this, the old woman picked up the shoes and her tears streamed down. She simply could not hurry over her packing, and Lo grew impatient.

Before they left, Li Hsiao-mei called. She had heard that her father and the three members of the Lo family were going off to help with the building of the road, and though her time was very fully occupied both with her job and her training in nursing, she had obtained a few hours' leave to see her father and relations. For it was known that the road would take many months to build and that it would take the workers farther and farther from Kunming. In her neat dress and with her well-brushed black hair, Hsiao-mei looked very attractive. Through days and months of dealing with strange people, she had completely lost her girlish shyness and was now more restrained in speech. After greeting every one in the house, she told her father that she was very sorry not to be going with him to look after him, but that she too could be helping

the nation in her own way, and that they must all look forward to meeting again in happier times. She had no doubt that the completion of the Burma Road and the bringing of big war supplies from America and Britain would lead to the overthrow of the Japanese.

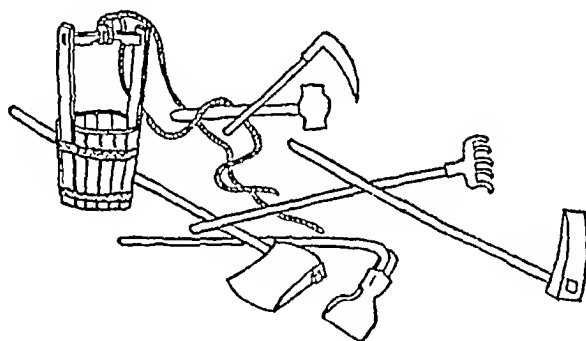
Her words cheered everyone but Lo's wife, who was still sad about the old shoes. Lo urged Hsiao-mei to try to persuade his wife to leave all her cherished possessions in her care, so that they could at once join the workers. Hsiao-mei achieved this very cleverly, and helped the old woman to pack a small bundle of the most necessary things. Lo gave her grateful praise. The house was then locked, and the five of them set off for the town, the three elders walking in front of the two youngsters.

Hsiao-mei told Tieh-mung that she had heard that the Japanese soldiers were very foolish men, with no will of their own. Believing fanatically in their Shintoist religion, they wished to die by Harakiri, which was to say, by killing themselves, at the dictate of the divine power of the Shinto, with their own little knives. Though Tieh-mung did not understand what 'Shinto' and 'Harakiri' meant, he laughed heartily at the humorous manner in which the story was told by Hsiao-mei. The three elders were delighted to notice how well the pair got on together. At the outskirts of the city the party divided, the old woman remanded Hsiao-mei to go next morning and see to the things left in her house. Hsiao-mei then went back to work at the Co-operative Society store, and Lo and his wife and son and Li joined the mass of road-builders. They were four quite insignificant units amid the hundred thousand odd labour recruits. The authorities wished to make no distinctions at first, though they realised that some might be better fitted for one kind of work, while others were better suited to another. They were anxious not to discourage the humblest effort.

It was proposed to lay the first section of the road across the plain of Yunnan, where it would be necessary only to level

the field-fences and break stones to form the bed, a great rock would be rolled along to smooth the surface. It was intended that the road should pursue roughly the ancient route from Burma to China which Marco Polo followed on his journey from Rome into Asia in the thirteenth century. There was no time for detailed planning. The multitude of helpers had to be got to work at once.

The crowd moved in a huge procession to the spot where the road was to begin, each person carrying a small bundle of possessions on his back. The authorities had provided a large quantity of long-handled hoes, mattocks, pickaxes, large baskets



NATIVE TOOLS

and other primitive native tools. There were very few mechanical tools, for machinery was difficult to transport to such a remote inland region, particularly in war-torn conditions, most of the farmer-labourers would in any case not have known how to handle them, and besides, the government needed its limited supplies of machinery for more important work at the front and in the factories. Some of the farmers brought their own hoes and pickaxes. To those who watched the great mass of humanity flowing through the streets of Kunming, it seemed as if the very country was on the move.

Old Lo grew more and more miserable at the thought of

assisting in the destruction of his own land. Not that he regretted his gift to the government, but it was natural for him, and more still for his wife, to feel acute regret at their loss; Lo even feared that his wife might not be able to control her feelings. So he begged permission for himself, his wife and son and Old Li to work on the next section of the road and thus avoid visiting their home and land again. His request was granted.



GIRL WORKERS

Lo and his wife were too old to do the heaviest work of road-building, so they sat on the grass at the bottom of a rocky hill with hundreds of others and broke stones. Each of these workers was provided with a hammer, which it was necessary to swing high and hard to break the stones. Sometimes fragments sprang up and struck the faces of the stone-breakers, but no one complained. Old Lo and his wife worked together. Lo split up the biggest stones and his wife chopped these into fine pieces. Li, being younger and very healthy and strong, was given the work of detaching big lumps of stone from the

hillside This did not give him at all the feeling of satisfaction he had formerly experienced when ploughing and cultivating his own land, but he laboured on with determination. Lo Tieh-ming and a crowd of other youngsters put the broken stones into baskets and carried them to those who were actually paving the road. Tieh-ming was very quick at his work, pouring out one basketful after another. He seemed to like the job better than working on his father's land, but this was only because he had not forgotten how LI Hsiao-mei had insisted that everyone should do his share for the nation. He had not been able to make himself understood to his parents before,



SHOVELLING SMALL STONES

but now that his whole family was working on the road he was happy.

Everyone in the great multitude worked amicably and efficiently. From daybreak to evening they moved on, foot by foot, yard by yard, without rest or recreation. No one expected either. Gradually the authorities were able to sort out the mass into groups and divide the extent of the road into sections, so that several stretches could be worked upon simultaneously. Meantime the Provincial Government had sent out requests to the heads of every village along the route that they should assemble their villagers and proceed with the building of the section which ran through or near their district. The response was wonderful. In many cases the villagers brought

with them sufficient food to last them for more than a hundred miles of the road, so that the government need not feed them. As the days went by, thousands more labourers joined the 'road army'. Even to the eye, the incredible ribbon of people was vivid and moving, it was as if the earth itself was working.

Old Lo, straightening his neck now and again to loosen the muscles, would gaze for a moment at the fertile rice-fields nearby and in the distance and say to Li 'I think those fields are badly in need of water'. Li's eyes would follow Lo's hand and he would agree: 'Yes, I think so too. It looks to be



MAKING A HOLE IN THE ROCK

a very fine crop'. They would soon be deep in conversation as to what should be done about the grass and weeds, quite forgetting their immediate task until an inspector came round to say that Lo's wife was waiting for more stones to break. This would make both Lo and Li feel guilty, and they would quickly return to their jobs. But many others in the multitude must have been thinking the same thoughts.

The first section of the road, from Kunning to I-p'ing-lang, was no great distance, and, except for a short stretch near the foot of a rocky mountain, was completed without much diffi-

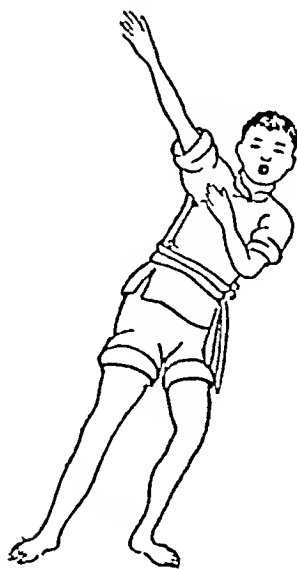
culty. Here the workers applied the ancient method of dynamiting the rock. The second sector ran from I-p'ing-liang to Hsiang-yun, and the third from Hsiang-yun to Hsiao-wan. By this time the authorities had contrived improvements in the method of controlling and distributing the labour and were using people more according to their individual capacities. Li found himself making small bridges, of which a great number were required along the road, for he had been used to doing carpentry and native hut-building in his spare time. Now and then he came for a little chat with Lo and his wife.

Tieh-ming's work also now separated him from his parents. As he had proved himself a good walker, a clear talker, and a boy of quick intelligence, he was chosen as a messenger between the sectors, and to read brief news bulletins to the workers about the war and the home front. He had the advantage or other youngsters brought up in the hinterland in that he could read. Sometimes he was asked to teach them a few words; more often it was patriotic songs they wished to learn. His mother was vexed that he should be away all day, and Lo had to remind her that Tieh-ming now belonged to the nation, and that it was thoughtful of the authorities to let him sleep in the same tent as his parents.

Groups of youngsters could now frequently be heard singing, and the older workers and the authorities encouraged them, for the singing had a cheering and stimulating effect. By degrees the elders too came to know the songs and could follow the rhythms unconsciously when the youngsters began them. Sometimes they joined in, not quite in tune. As Lo Tieh-ming had a clear ringing voice it was usually he who started the singing, and he grew very popular among all the workers old and young. The Chinese, in comparison with Western nations, are not a very musical race, but these great outbursts of song across the wide spaces and great heights of Yunnan did not go unmarked but extremely impressive. Perhaps there had never before been heard in that remote region, such a huge roar. Not even the roar of rivers and the noise of outdoor

A GREAT MULTITUDE

Now from peak to peak the echoes rang, and the sound rolled
 into the valleys It seemed that the wild beasts must have stood
 still to listen and the chattering birds have ceased their flights
 It was a cry to tell the world that a new nation was in being



LO TIEH-MING SINGS

Now Tieh-ming led them with this 'road-shanty', the
 Chinese National Flag song

* Men of China, proud and free,
 Let the stars your garment be
 As you plough uneven soil,
 Reap the harvest of your toil
 Fight for your land,
 Freedom's at hand
 Mankind march on,
 Speed ye the dawn
 Heaven blue, sun of white,
 Field of red, standard bright

* Written by Tai Chi-Jao and translated by Ju Ting-Hsiu

Men of China, proud and free,
Work to win equality
Let the shovel smooth the road,
Labour, lighten mankind's load
Fight for your land,
Freedom's at hand
Mankind march on,
Speed ye the dawn.
Heaven blue, sun of white,
Field of red, standard bright

Men of China, proud and free,
Lift your sword for liberty
With your blood cleanse ye the earth,
Brotherhood must have its birth.
Old days are done,
Our battle won
Mankind march on,
Speed ye the dawn
Heaven blue, sun of white,
Field of red, standard bright

Men of China, proud and free,
Learning's lantern burns for thee
Science aids us in our fight,
Brings the world to wisdom's light
Old days are done,
Our battle won
Mankind march on,
Speed ye the dawn
Heaven blue, sun of white,
Field of red, standard bright

VII

UNEXPECTED

ABOUT three months later the road reached the outskirts of the city of Hsiakwan, 257 miles from Kunming. It had taken the workers immense toil to get so far, and their achievement was considered little less than a miracle. So far the road, though very rough, was ready for use, and motor-traffic from Kunming was coming through, which in itself helped to smooth the surface.

But the road-builders knew that beyond Hsiakwan they would have to face even greater risks and difficulties than before. Yet Lo seemed to grow more cheerful as the days went by. He had given up everything to help finish the road as quickly as possible, and he felt he was coming within sight of his objective. His wife, not unnaturally, had rather different feelings. It was not her resolve that had changed, but her health. Lately she had grown more and more tired, and had begun to murmur that she needed a rest. Lo tried to encourage her with descriptions of the peaceful life they would make for themselves after the war.

At the moment, however, both were concerned about Tieh-ming, who had not been seen on the road for nearly the whole day. Everyone was enquiring about him. His cheerful manner and invariably helpful attitude had won universal regard. He would never refuse a request, from old or young, to pick up a tobacco pouch that had been dropped a long way down a gorge, or to carry a spade or other tool any distance. Yet the execution of these favours never interfered with his own duties. He looked no different from the other youngsters, but everyone was so fond of him that it struck them at once when he was not there to lend a hand as usual. At first, Lo and his wife did not pay much attention to the enquiries, but later, when the Road Inspector asked the same questions, they began to worry. The old mother was particularly troubled lest some-

thing should have happened to her only surviving offspring. And this, alas, was far from improbable, for already a large number of workers had met their death through epidemic, cold, blasting, landslide, or fall. The mass of people still worked on, regardless of dangers, determined to carry through the construction of China's life-line. Their numbers had even increased. They may have appeared fatalists, but actually they were simply resolved that, come what may, they would finish their task. The feelings of Tieh-ming's mother, however, were not so simple. She cared little for her own life, which she was quite prepared to sacrifice to the road, but she wanted her only son to carry on the family name and do more creative work for the nation after her death. Consequently his present disappearance troubled her deeply. A search for him was started. Almost everyone in the sector joined in, out of personal regard for the boy. They stopped their work for a few hours to try to find him.

Happily nothing dreadful had happened to Tieh-ming. He had only strayed a little from the road. He had been sent with a message to a section of workers near Hsiakwan, and it did not take him very long to deliver it. On his way back he was stopped by two very tall men wearing dark red silk coats and blue trousers, not quite like Chinese costumes, who asked the boy the way to town. Tieh-ming, in his usual straightforward manner, directed them without hesitation. He had not, in point of fact, ever been inside Hsiakwan himself, but as this seemed a good opportunity to go and look round, he offered to conduct the men.

He learnt that they were Tibetans. They spoke Chinese fluently, and told the boy that they came annually to Hsiakwan, and also to Tai, which was not far away, to trade with the Chinese and other neighbouring peoples. At this time of year the big market at Hsiakwan attracted many different peoples, mostly Chinese and Tibetans, but a few Shans and Lolo, as well, to exchange goods in the immemorial Chinese manner. The men had little idea of the rest of the world, but they were

quite happy in their restricted mode of life. During the period of the market Hsiakwan was gay with the variegated native costumes of the traders, whose business, since the construction of the Burma Road, was brisker than ever. And for the first



TIBETANS

time for perhaps centuries, news of the outside world was being disseminated in the town. The Yunnan Provincial Government had seized the opportunity provided by the market to awaken the inhabitants of this remote hinterland to the realities of the great struggle which the Chinese nation was now waging. So, in addition to the local civil servants, a number of young officials had been sent to give addresses during the market.

Perhaps it was not very prudent of Tieh-ming to go to Hsiakwan, but after all he was still only a boy. His young mind, interested in everything new, could not resist the temptation to step into the big market and see it for himself. He moved on from one corner to the next, and squeezed his way through one huge crowd after another. The sights he saw made his eyes open wide and his mouth break into a big smile. He was thrilled to listen to the many native girls in their different brightly-coloured dresses, though he could not understand their

language. He watched the tradesmen doing their business, he could not imagine what some of the goods they were exchanging could be used for. For the time being he quite forgot his road work.

Presently he saw a specially large crowd gathering to hear somebody speak, so he stepped up too. A young official was describing how the Japanese invaded China. But Tieh-ming's attention was almost immediately distracted to where another speaker, perched on some sort of stand, was addressing an even bigger crowd. At first he could not see the speaker's face, but on moving closer, he found, to his great surprise, that it



A SHAN GIRL WITH HER JEWELS

was his relation Li Hsiao-mei. He let out a cry of joy. Nobody took any notice of him, however, and Li Hsiao-mei continued her speech on the importance and necessity of the Burma Road. It was obvious that her purpose was to recruit labour for work on the road. Many answered her call enthusiastically, and it was amid their uproar that Tieh-ming's little shout was lost. To end her address the speaker tried to teach the crowd to sing the Chinese National Anthem, but as most of them were Tibetans and other non-Chinese races, very few joined in. Lo Tieh-ming of course, sang as loud as he could. Then Hsiao-mei came down from the stand and Tieh-ming was able to

speak to her. She was delighted to see him, but when she asked why he had come to Hsiakwan instead of working on the road, Tieh-mung blushed crimson and gave no answer.

After a few minutes' chat the pair walked back together to the tent in which Old Lo and his wife slept. The moment one of the searchers sighted the boy all of them hailed him with pleasure, though they had wasted some of their valuable hours searching for him. Hsiao-mei tried to excuse Tieh-mung, but Old Lo was very angry indeed. The old man thought that this might be a good opportunity to put a stop to the murmuring and grumbling which had been going on recently among the workers, who, after toiling day and night for many months, were not maintaining the same high spirit as at the beginning of the great enterprise. Old Lo had recently heard one worker—one of the few bad ones among the thousands—complain that the government provided only rice to eat, and he had heard others grumble about the lack of rest and entertainment. 'Tieh-mung, you wicked boy, I am ashamed of being your father,' he cried furiously. 'We are here to build a road for the maintenance of the life-and-death struggle of our nation. We are not here to seek pleasure. This is no time to pick and choose what we eat, so long as we have something to satisfy our hunger, and it is no time for enjoyment when the very life of China is threatened by the Japanese. Our duty is to finish the road, and we can only hope for better things after the war. Who are you, Tieh-mung, to neglect your duty for a whole day? And who are you to cause us all to waste our valuable time looking for you? I am ashamed of being the father of such a boy.' The old man was really annoyed, and Tieh-mung now fully realised his fault in neglecting his duty, and resolved to be more obedient to his father. Presently the elder workmen in the tent tried to calm the old man's temper, saying that Tieh-mung was still very young and should be forgiven this time. The road inspector pleaded for him too and asked the boy to promise his father that he would never stray from his work again.

Lo's wife, the aged mother, was overjoyed to see her son back again. Her compassion for him was definitely higher than her patriotism at that moment. She felt that Lo was treating the boy too harshly, and she was not going to upset herself too much about Tieh-ming's behaviour. Secretly she was extremely pleased to see him in company with Li Hsiao-mei and to notice the good terms they were on. She was feeling older and older and now really did not care much about the rest of her life. The only thing that interested her was the future of her young son. She was beginning to think of him as a well-built grown-up man, and she liked to believe that he would have a family to carry on the name of Lo. Li Hsiao-mei would make him a good wife, especially as they were so fond of each other. The old woman's eyes were half-closed and she was smiling vaguely at the girl in front of her. It would be embarrassing to discuss such a subject as marriage directly with the girl.

Presently Old Li, who had heard of his daughter's arrival, dropped in from his bridge-building group. Father and daughter exchanged happy enquiries, and this turned the aged mother's thoughts for the moment. When her mind returned to its perpetual theme, Hsiao-mei was rising to go. Soon it would be dark, and the girl had to join the rest of the party selected by the Provincial Government to make speeches, and return to Kunming the next day. Lo's wife was disappointed to see her go, but later reflected that it might be easier to talk her subject over with Old Li. Unfortunately Li went out with his daughter.

The old woman did not, however, put aside her son's marriage to Li Hsiao-mei, and she carried on with her stone-breaking, but her arms felt heavier and heavier, and she knew now that she was far from well. It was just because of this that she yearned more and more to have a daughter-in-law to help with the housework when the Burma Road was finished and they all returned home.

Then she contracted malaria and became too weak to move.

She was given rough medical attention, and moved to an isolation camp for the sick a little distance from the road, which had now surmounted its highest point. More than sixty miles lay between Hsiakwan and the next town, and real nursing was therefore not available.

The road at this point was a very remarkable sight. From its highest elevation, 8,500 feet above sea-level, it fell steeply to 2,500 feet across what proved to be the most difficult and dangerous section of the route. The terrain, which had never even been explored by the Chinese or bordering races, remained just as it had been thousands of years before. Below, through a deep valley, ran the torrential river Mekong, punctuated with rapids. Along both banks lay unknown jungles over which, after the alternating heavy rains and hot sunshine, a heavy vapour, tainted with poisonous emanations, hung. Many of the workers had not escaped affection in this air and had contracted malaria. Lo's wife was one of them. Fortunately Lo himself, Tieh-ming and Li seemed to have escaped, doubtless through the strength of their constitutions. Very few of those who succumbed could have survived under such inadequate medical attention, and before long it was clear that Lo's wife would not stay long in the isolation camp.

At the end she was quite clear in her mind. Staring at the wet cloth-ceiling of the tent and touching the damp hay of the mattress on which she was lying, she called to Lo that she had a lot to tell him, but there was no answer from her husband, only once or twice from the much-needed nurse. When she realised that her husband was not in the camp she felt relieved that he was not ill. 'He must be busy on the road,' she murmured. 'I only wish that the road could be finished soon, so that we could go home.' Presently she called again and again for Tieh-ming, mixing the name with that of Li Hsiao-mei who, it appeared, was the girl she wished to have as her daughter-in-law. No one answered her. At that moment Tieh-ming was leading a large group of workers who were dragging a huge rock along the road sur-

face at a height of 7,000 feet Rounding a peak they sang the
March of the Volunteers *

A-rise ! Ye who refuse to be bond slaves !
With our very flesh and blood
Let us build our new Great Wall
China's masses have met the day of danger,
Indignation fills the heart of all of our countrymen
A-rise ! A-rise !
Many hearts with one mind,
Brave the enemy's gunfire,
March on !
Brave the enemy's gunfire,
March on ! March on ! March on ! on !

Once again the powerful singing was the only sound to be heard in that vast area. The feeble voice of a dying old woman could never reach the ears of her beloved son. The new world and the new life of China was closed to her.

The death of his wife was a great shock to Old Lo, but it made him more determined than ever to face every risk and accept every sacrifice to help finish the Burma Road. His sole object in life was now to beat the Japanese, and thus save thousands, millions of his fellow-beings from the fate which had been his. But for the Japanese militarists, he reflected, his daughter, his son-in-law, his baby grandson, his elder son Kan-ming, his cousin and his old wife would still be alive. Above all, he with his wife and Tieh-mung would still be pursuing a peaceful life on his own land. All that was gone. He had only Tieh-mung to worry about now. But at least he knew that the boy was tough and honest and able to fight the battles of life himself.

Though Old Lo's hair and beard were whiter and his eyes more sunken, his face had not lost its courageous expression

* Written by T'ien Han and translated by Li Pao-Ch'en

Working on the road, he now kept a constant eye on Tieh-ming, lest the boy should neglect his duty out of youthfulness or playfulness of heart. But Tieh-ming had changed much recently. Since his father scolded him for wandering into Hsiakwan he had worked harder and quicker than ever. Always now he was the first to finish his duty for the day, but always he would continue until rest and sleep overtook all the workers.

His motherless condition won sympathy from everyone. It is a Chinese custom for a man who has lost his wife or a woman her husband, and especially for a child who has lost either parent, to remain indoors for a time in mourning, as a mark of affection and respect. But Old Lo and Tieh-ming did not stop work on the Burma Road for a moment.



RAMMING THE ROAD SURFACE

VIII

ETERNITY

WHEN Li heard of the death of Old Lo's wife he left his camp at once to go to him

It was dusk. The sunset sent a crimson shaft above the western horizon. Below them the mist lolled in the huge valley like a mammoth grey monster. There came to Li the memory of the walk the two of them had taken after their visit to the schools' assembly at the Temple of Confucius.

'Does this not remind you of our walk by Lake Kunming a year ago?' said Li. 'What changes there have been in both our families since then!'

'Yes, indeed,' replied Lo, sighing. 'I never imagined there would be such disruptions in my life. All that my wife and I wanted was to work together to bring up our children well. We had no wish to interfere with other people and never thought others would interfere with us. Now all my family except Tich-ming are gone. It is the Japanese who have brought all this sorrow into our lives. The Japanese alone.'

'I feel that way too,' answered Li. 'The Burma Road must be finished. Those supplies from our allies must be brought to China as quickly as possible. Only then can we be avenged.'

'Yes, we must finish the road,' repeated Old Lo.

'By the way,' Li went on, 'I shall soon have a most difficult job on hand. A long suspension bridge is to be built over the river Mekong. I don't know how suspension bridges are built. I know now how to build small wooden or stone bridges, we have already built more than a hundred of them, and countless culverts besides. It is sad that so many of the workmen should have lost their lives in the work, but I suppose it can't be helped.'

'How were they killed?' asked Lo.



LI IS BLASTED INTO THE RIVER MEKONG



OLD LO MAKES A HOLE IN THE ROCK

'Foundations for the bridges have to be laid, and many of the workers were simply washed away by the rapids. As we have no modern machines or any good implements we had to fill brick on the old-fashioned water-wheels such as we used to use for irrigating our ricefields, and drain away the water from the foundation cavities with those. It was terrible when there was a leakage and the water rushed through the temporary lock. The mass of water coming in was too powerful for any of us to keep our footing. I have had many a narrow escape from death, think heaven, think earth.'

'Yes, think heaven, think earth. You must have been assigned by heaven to finish this great task of ours,' said Lo solemnly. 'I believe that if we have faith we can overcome our hardships. This morning our road inspector told us that a number of sturdy workmen had been sent to look for chestnut trees. Are those for your bridge-building?'

'Yes, we use chestnut timber for the bridge-beds. They say we shall use a lot more for the projected Mekong bridge. Chestnut trees are scarce and grow some distance away, and hundreds of men were sent to almost unknown forests to find them. Many of the men never come back. What sacrifices we must bear to save our nation!'

'They will not be in vain,' answered Old Lo quietly. 'We ourselves may not benefit by our sacrifices. We make them for the sake of future generations. Our ancestors suffered for us, and we must suffer for our children. Determination must carry us through.'

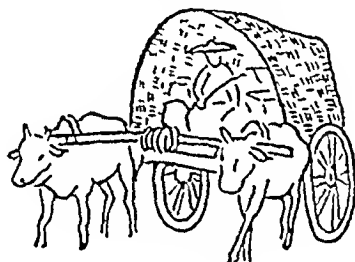
'Determination makes me brave in the face of danger,' said Li. 'My will to see this war through has been strengthened since my wife and baby son were killed. We shall win, we must win. You wait—I shall invite you to drink wine at my new home when the war is over!'

Li had recovered his habitual energy and smiled broadly as he spoke. Just then he noticed that Tich-mung was standing beside his father listening attentively to the conversation, and he turned and said to him, 'Tich-mung, you must come too.'

'Yes, I will,' replied the boy merrily, and Old Lo smiled. Li then said goodbye and left them together in the gathering darkness.

Soon afterwards Li began his new job. His group of bridge-workers reached the riverside earlier than the mass of road-workers among whom were Lo and his son.

They were about 2,500 feet above sea-level, and the road was to cut steeply down from a point 7,500 feet above. The river-edge was pitted with dangerous rocks, cliffs, marshes and undergrowth. The width of the river made it impossible to erect a temporary lock to drain away the water, nor could foundations



OX-CART

be laid beneath such furious rapids. That was why the engineers had decided to build a suspension bridge.

The Central Government in Chungking provided machinery for the construction of the Burma Road where machinery was absolutely necessary, but no heavy implements such as elevators and cranes were available. Heavy machinery could not be moved quickly from a long distance, and in any case no men could be spared from other important work to move it. Many heavy iron chains and other implements had already been brought by ox-cart, but the problem of getting these chains over to the other side of the river remained. For lack of elevators, the task of conveying them fell to human hands.

First, a solid stone foundation was built on the near bank, and the end of a long, thick chain fastened securely to it. Then a

number of workers had to cross the river and attach the other end of the chain to the further bank. Li was selected for this task because he could swim. He and his fellow-workers struggled doggedly through the rough water, many of them being washed away. Often they were attacked by unseen creatures in the water, and had to turn back. Li was the first to reach the further bank, and he arrived weak and exhausted.

The chain itself could not of course be taken across the river by the swimmers, so it was tied to pieces of stout cord, and each man held one of these as he swam. On reaching the further bank the men hauled the chain over and made it fast.



SWIMMING OVER THE RIVER MEKONG

Those of the workers who could not swim pulled themselves across the river with the help of the chain, but if their grasp was not firm they were drowned. In due course the second chain was made fast, and then, in the nine feet of space between the two chains, were fixed a number of chestnut logs of equal thickness and width to make the bridge-bed. This was no easy job, and only Li and a few others were able to do it. They worked feverishly, but as the work began to shape itself, Li felt happy again. He now saw the advantage of having the bridge, and smiled to himself at the thought that it was not so difficult to build as he had been told. He began to work easily and rhythmically, fixing one timber after another. Soon there were

not many more to be done, and he began to wonder what would be the next job

But unhappily a powerful gust of wind swept up from behind and blew him headlong into the swirling rapids. His fellow-workers were helpless to save him, and thus Li met his fate before he had achieved his desire to see the bridge completed.

Li's fellows were too accustomed to tragedy to feel his death more keenly than that of the many others who had suffered the same fate before him, but Old Lo was heartbroken. He was too stricken now to think of the past; he only remembered that a day or two ago he had been talking cheerfully with Li about the building of the suspension bridge. Though Li had admitted it would be a very difficult task, he had seemed so confident that he would see it completed, and indeed, much of that task he had accomplished. But alas, thought Old Lo, heaven has dealt cruelly with Li and myself as with many others. How could he bear this last terrible blow? Grimly he rose from his seat and vowed silently that Li's death should not be in vain and that he would carry on the work, and taking out his big hammer and baskets he went to break stones.

Next day, after exchanging the usual morning greetings, no one made any reference to Li, but continued their previous day's work. Nor did Lo show by word or sign how heavy his heart was. He closed his lips tightly and made no complaint. He heard nothing, and nothing could move him from breaking stones, not even the patriotic song to the strain of which Tieh-mung led the other road-workers round a nearby mountain bluff.

Another day's work was finished. It would have been unusual in normal circumstances for Lo to have thought about Hsiao-mei, but now he told Tieh-mung to write and inform her of her father's death. Tieh-mung would have done so willingly, but he could find no brush, ink or paper in their tent, so he hurried out to borrow some from his road inspector. He wrote the letter, read it to his father, put it in an envelope with Li

Hsiao-mei's address in Kunming, and when returning the brush and ink to the inspector asked him to post the letter. Neither Lo nor the boy had any idea how long it would take to reach Kunming.

The incident drew Lo's thoughts to the link between the girl and his son, and although he had not in the past bothered himself about their relationship as his wife had done, he began now to think of their future.

At last the suspension bridge over the river Mekong was finished. Lo and his son and the rest of the men were working now on the far side of the river. From here the road-line



A MODERN ROAD INSPECTOR

ascended steeply again to 7,500 feet. From such a height down to the 2,500-foot level the job had been bad enough, but it would be even worse to work on the ascent. No one would have time to admire the beautiful lines of the rocks and peaks, nor the exquisite forms and colours of the many flowers in bloom. Many were the lives that had been lost, and the work was urgent.

They were now on the outskirts of a tiny city called Paoshan. Though tiny, it had been greatly loved by Marco Polo, and

described in his writings. It resembled Nanking in its arrangement of streets, buildings and city-walls, thus long ago earning the name of 'Little Nanking'. As the city was so small and the road-line quite close to it, the workers could see the interior from the road. The natives and the other peoples akin to them who dwelt there had never seen so many people in their lives, and they all came to the roadside to watch them working. Young girls in their different native costumes of brilliant colours



LOLO PEOPLE

stood smiling by the roadside, talking incessantly. The men were more reserved. The sight of so much youth and freshness cheered the workers' spirits, but Tich-ming did not even glance that way. He had not forgotten what had happened to him after his visit to Hsiakwan, and he knew he must not be idle and neglect his work. So he stuck out his chest and went on carrying small stones. Some of the other youngsters made casual remarks about the spectators, but Tich-ming reproved them.

When he led the workers in patriotic songs he stuck out his chest more than ever, and his courageous bearing excited his fair spectators as to his identity

Soon another small city, called Yung-ping, was reached, and another suspension bridge had to be constructed over the river Salween. The approach was almost as steep as at the Mekong bridge, the actual shores being steeper. The new suspension



BURMESE GIRLS

bridge was finished despite many difficulties and great loss of life. The river itself was more beautiful than the Mekong, flowing through very picturesque country. The tourists and sight-seers who might enjoy the beauty of the river after the war could never, Lo thought, realize the grim struggle that had been waged to build the bridge or guess how many men had lost their lives on it. They would not know of Li. They would

not know that the sight of this bridge brought back to Old Lo the vivid memory of his friend and relative

When they reached the city of Lungling the men could almost count the days it would take to finish the road, though there remained some sixty miles from Wanting, which is on the border between Burma and China, to be built. Beyond Lungling the country is largely inhabited by Shan people, whose customs and language are quite different from those of China. Except for those living outside Wanting, however, the population falls within the administrative area of Yunnan. These people proved very helpful in the building of the Burma Road. They supplied food and many of them joined the workers.

Beyond the Salween the land again ascends to 7,500 feet or more, and then dips down to Lungling. While they were working near Lungling the engineers of that section decided to arrange a meeting with another section at the border. A messenger had to be sent with a request that a day be fixed for the opening of the entire road. The job fell to Tich-ming, Old Lo having been consulted. Had there been a serviceable foot-path from Lungling to Wanting, it would not have taken Tich-ming more than two or three days to cover the sixty miles, but the huge rocks and sand-hills around Lungling impeded progress, and the mud after rain was so deep that Tich-ming was given a good deal longer to deliver his message.

No sooner had his son left than Old Lo undertook a new job. In each section there were a number of men engaged in dynamiting the huge rocks obstructing the way. Suitable machinery was lacking, and man-power was used wherever possible. Many of the dynamite workers, as Lo well knew, had either met their death or been seriously injured by explosions. This was the great problem confronting the road engineers, since nearly all the experienced workers were recovering from injuries. Hearing of this Old Lo, driven by some inner force and having great faith in his own ability, offered his services. His offer was accepted, and an hour or two later, fastened by a

leather belt around his waist, Lo was dropped over the edge of a high cliff. Suspended in the air, he looked down at the deep marshes below. He made a small hole in the rock-face with a hammer and filled it with dynamite. Then he covered the dynamite with sand to retard its action and give him sufficient time to climb back up the cliff. No sooner had he reached the top than the powder exploded. The result was successful, and Lo repeated it a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and a seventh time. But the seventh time was the last.

Was it that Lo had over-tired himself, or was he over-confident and careless? Whatever the reason, he forgot to cover the powder with sand, the explosion occurred almost immediately, and he was blown to pieces. He could have finished off the job on the following day, but his zeal had led him beyond the limit of his endurance. He had never doubted that he would see the Burma Road finished, and that had not quite happened. He died, unknown, like the hundreds of others who sacrificed themselves to the road.

As for Tieh-ming, even he came near to death. After leaving his father and the rest, he walked cheerfully and quickly. He climbed the rocks and cliffs easily, and on his way he sang one song after another in order to keep up his spirits. It was not very long before he reached the next sector and heard other voices joining in his songs. He was known to the workers there too, and was given a very warm welcome. After sharing a little food he started to move on again. As he turned to give a last look at his companions there was a deafening crack like thunder. It was too late for him to run before the land-slide of a huge sandhill. Many of the men were buried immediately and were later dug out, dead, by another band of workers. The engineers in Tieh-ming's section, when they heard of the catastrophe, assumed that the boy had been buried, and sent out another messenger.

It was a miracle that Tieh-ming was not killed. Luckily he had just left the group of men working by the sandhill, and he was flung by the explosion to the edge of the landslide. As he

fell he was stopped by a huge rock which supported him and shielded him from the great mass of moving sand

After a long time the fall of sand slackened, and Tieh-ming was able to move. He was very weak, but little by little he managed to shake off the sand from his body. The continuous movement had made the rock unstable, and seeing it move, Tieh-ming grasped the branch of a small tree. Then the rock gave way altogether and rolled down into some marshy water surrounded by tall weeds and bushes, the loud splash frightening away a hungry tiger which had apparently been hidden in the marsh and had been observing the boy for some time. At the sound of the splash the animal gave a great leap and vanished. Tieh-ming had never before seen a real tiger, and at the thought of all he had heard about people being eaten by tigers he collapsed and lost consciousness.

Night fell and a new day broke, and the boy lay there still unconscious. When at last he opened his eyes he was surprised to see a crowd of monkeys dart away from him. In that region the weather was mild and rather cold at night, and the monkeys had crouched round Tieh-ming for warmth and in turn had kept the boy warm. Tieh-ming now began to feel hungry, and his eyes followed the monkeys leaping from one tree to another and picking the wild rose-berries and other green fruits. Tieh-ming ate some too and felt better. The next thing he knew he must do was to find a way up to the road-line. Without much idea of direction, he walked steadily up and up. The monkeys all ran away.

As it happened, his fall had shortened his journey considerably. It was impossible to reascend the cliff directly, so he moved in the only direction open to him. After another night and day, with scarcely anything to eat or drink, he managed to find the road-line not far from some workmen, but he was too exhausted to reach them before he collapsed again.

When he came round he was lying in a hospital at Lashio. He had not lost the message, which he had kept all the time inside his pocket. He had been seen by one of the workers and

moved to the engineers' camp at Wanting. They had found the message in his pocket, and thus had enabled them to hurry up the completion of the road. In the meantime they sent Tieh-ming by car from Wanting to Lashio for medical treatment.

At Wanting the road reaches the boundary of Chinese territory. The stretch between, 116 miles, was made by the Burmese authorities with all the necessary machinery, and the hardships and difficulties which obtained on Chinese territory had been minimised. Tieh-mung's message, delivered while he was still unconscious, arrived a few days earlier than the second message, and in response to it the foreman at Wanting had already started preparations to hasten the work and plan the opening of the route for the transport of war supplies accumulated at Lashio. The authorities both in Burma and in China had now fixed a day for the opening.

It is 610 miles from Wanting to Kunming, and the Chinese workers had built the road over this distance, under the most primitive conditions, in nine months. Using only their hands, they erected 289 bridges, including two big suspension bridges with a load-bearing capacity of 10 to 15 tons, and 1,959 culverts. The road-bed is sixteen feet wide, has a maximum grade of eight in a hundred and a minimum curve radius of fifty feet. The initial cost of construction borne by the Government was between five and six million Chinese dollars—less than £90,000 in English money. A large majority of the workers received no wages, and most of them brought their families and provided their own food. Anyone with a little knowledge of engineering and modern road construction would refuse to consider building a 610-mile road in nine months, even with much more than £100,000 to spend, and all necessary machinery. But the Burma Road was not, for the time being, intended for comfortable driving by tourists, but solely for the speedy transport of arms and supplies from China's friends. Every yard had been constantly improved since its construction by one band of workers after another. Lo and his wife and Li and thousands

of others would have been greatly relieved to know that the road had been finished and that supplies were coming into the country, but that could not be. It would be to underrate and misconstrue their sacrifice to judge this road by modern standards.

To everyone's delight Tieh-ming was appointed to drive the first lorry along the road on the opening day. It was felt that his services, and the sacrifice of life made by his family, should be thus rewarded.

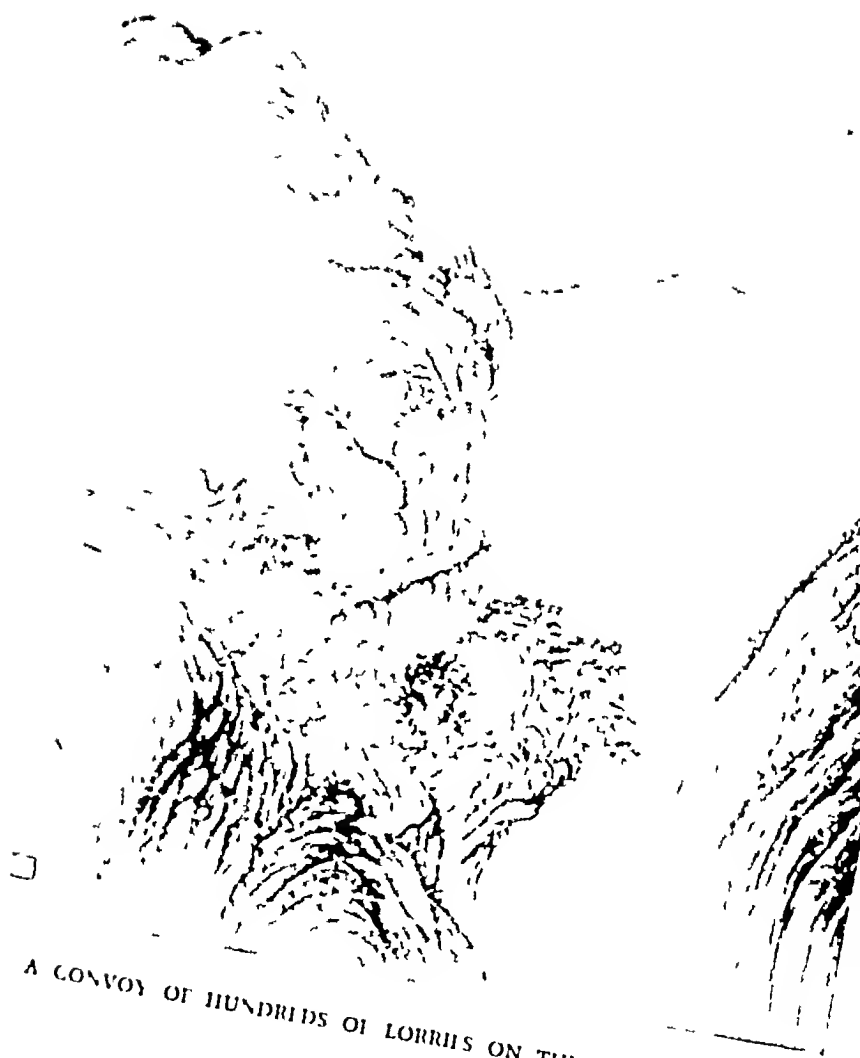
Tieh-ming, lying weak and exhausted in hospital and suffering from some disease he had contracted, knew nothing of this.

One day, after a long and soothing sleep, he awoke to feel a soft warm cheek against his. He moved slightly, and the cheek was quickly withdrawn. Looking up he was amazed to see Li Hsiao-mei in nurse's uniform beside his bed. Overwhelmed with joy, he stretched out his arms and embraced her, as he used as a child to embrace his old mother. They both blushed, and it was Hsiao-mei who first recovered herself and told her patient to rest. After this episode they were rather embarrassed with each other, particularly Tieh-ming, for in China such conduct on the part of a young boy towards an unmarried girl-cousin is not looked upon with approval. Tieh-ming shut his eyes tightly in shame.

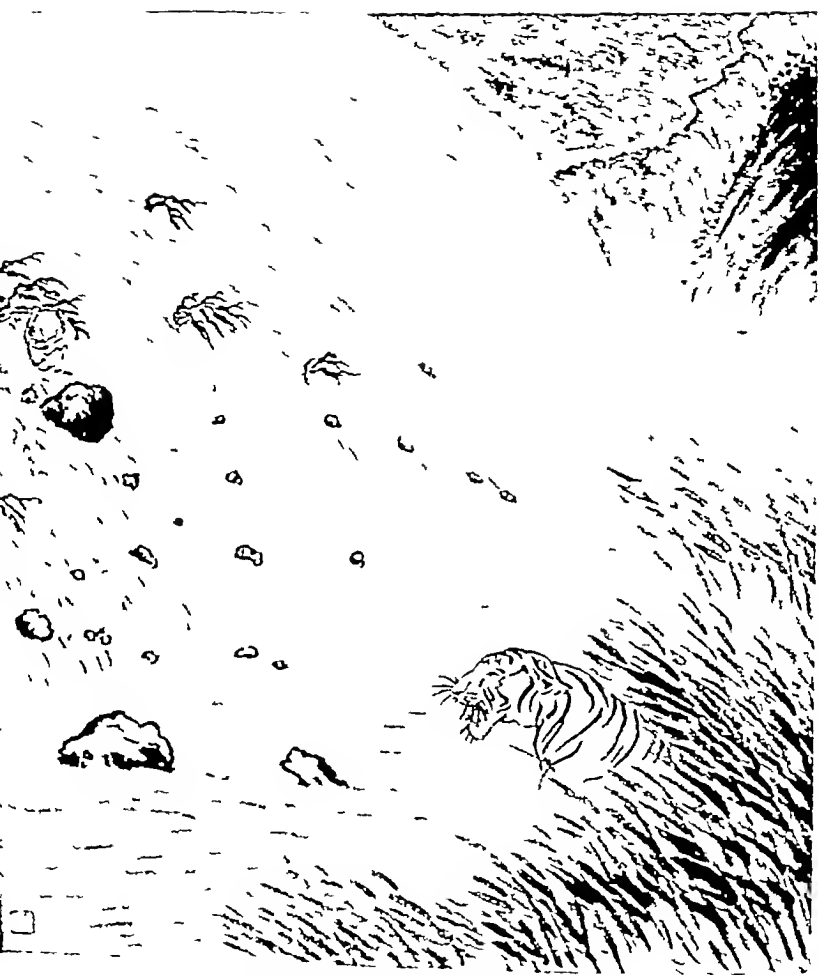
Hsiao-mei was called away at last to the side of another patient, and Tieh-ming's embarrassment diminished.

The lad quickly recovered with the help of careful nursing, and when he was quite better the news of his father's death was broken to him. His grief drew him closer to Hsiao-mei. Only she could comfort and put fresh heart into him. She urged him to become a driver and thus help to bring the supplies into China.

At last the great day arrived. A special lorry had been painted on both sides with the name 'Lo Tieh-ming'. Everything was ready, and great crowds assembled at the commencement of the road. Tieh-ming felt happy. He pushed back some



A CONVOY OF HUNDREDS OF LORRIES ON THE BURMA ROAD



LO TIEH-MING SURVIVES THE LANDSLIDE

of the crowd and, squeezing Hsiao-mei's hand tightly, jumped into the lorry and set off amid loud cheering, followed by about a thousand lorries. It took them five days to reach Kunming. There was an even greater crowd at Kunming Station, and Tieh-ming smiled broadly as he got down from the lorry. Unlike Old Lo, he did not mind the journalists and photographers who surrounded him, and soon on the walls of Kunming, and on the front pages of the newspapers, were emblazoned the words 'Lo Tieh-ming, the little hero of the Burma Road'

Next morning he received a letter just before setting out on the return journey, and sat down to read it:

'MY DEAR COUSIN TIEH-MING,

'I was so pleased to see you drive the first lorry on the new road, and hope you have arrived safely in Kunming by the time this letter reaches you. I wish I could have been there to meet you.

'Now both you and I are orphans—we have only each other, and we must not forget that the Japanese have made us orphans. We must go on working for China until our enemies are driven out. I am sure our friends, America and Britain, will continue to aid us, for they are peace-loving peoples. Your work, dear cousin, as a lorry-driver carrying war supplies is most important and essential to the nation. I pray that you will do your utmost to fulfil your duty and not falter in your responsibility to our soldiers. Remember the fate of your mother, your father, and your brother and sister.

'I have finished my training as a nurse and have done some practical work, and I am writing to tell you that I am going to the North to nurse our wounded at the front, so that I can render my humble service to the nation as every girl citizen should. Let us worship the spirits of our parents, our kinsmen, and all our comrades who have died in this war, and fulfil our duties to the best of our abilities. And let us hope that you and I may yet be able to live together peacefully, and carry out our parents' wish faithfully, after the war is over . . .'

Being young, Tieh-ming was puzzled by the words 'You and I may yet be able to live together', and he repeated them to himself several times before reading further, but although he did not quite understand them, somehow they made him feel very happy

There was not much news after that, and presently Tieh-ming folded the letter and put it carefully into his inside pocket. Next minute his lorry was off, followed by the thousand others. As he trundled along the road he heard the receding cry:

'Lo Tieh-ming, the little hero of the Burma Road.'

